

## COMMENTARY

# My true identity comes from my family

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For The Post-Crescent



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missed my wife when I was gone. But whether I was gone for one night or 10, I was pretty sure she wouldn't be saying any new words when I got back. I was confident there wouldn't be any new teeth or gaps where one fell out. And she wasn't going to have any milestones like first words, first steps or first full nights of sleep.

All right, that was one perk. My hotel bed in was out of earshot when Daughter No. 1 decided it was time for her late-night-snack-and-rocking-while-her-first-time-parents-hummed-rock-'n-roll-tunes-because-they-didn't-know-any-real-lullabys.

"Hush little baby, don't say a word, you gotta fight for your right to paaaaarty."

Mainly, though, hotels were just the places I sat, alone, asking myself what cute thing my kids did that day.

"Did No.1 get all those shapes into the right holes?"

"Did she take any steps or say any new words?"

"Did No. 2 set any new projectile-vomit distance records?"

I didn't miss any big events, but I almost did. On my first trip to Russia, my wife would update me on Daughter No. 2's progress toward her first steps. Miraculously, the very night I got home, she walked!

Actually, she ran — away from Mommy.

It turns out that any time it looked like that first step might be coming, Mommy would knock the girl over and say, "Oh, so close, honey." Now 7, No. 2 runs like a champ, but can't walk more than three steps without falling over.

I got out of the traveling business and tried my hand at the 9-5 manufacturing world. Turns out, 9-5 is more of a guideline that actually encompassed all the numbers on the clock — sometimes in a row.

I'd come home and fall asleep on the floor while my girls crawled over me. And by fall asleep, I mean pass out. One time, they poked me with a stick to see if I was still alive.

So that didn't last either. And today, I find myself wondering what I want to be when I grow up. I've learned a ton in my 15-plus years of working. But I haven't figured out if I'm supposed to be Mr. Baker, or Mr. Smith, or what.

In a low self-esteem moment (a common side effect of leaving or losing a job with no follow-up plan in place), I asked my wife if there was a job at which I could be successful and happy.

She told me, "Yes. Father and husband."

Her response made me smile. Here were two jobs I would never lose, or be downsized out of, or leave. Yeah, the pay stinks. But the benefits are spectacular.

You ask what I do for a living and I'll tell you, "I live for my family."

Of course, I'll also ask if you know of anyone looking for an out-of-work wordsmith.

Many moons ago, a man was defined by his profession. The guy who blacksmithed horseshoes and other metal implements was Mr. Smith. The guy who baked bread was Mr. Baker. The guy who waxed surfboards was Mr. Duuuuuude. Well, OK. That last one is a stretch.

Being named for your job isn't really happening anymore. I know lots of insurance people, none of whose names are Mr. Deductible, or Ms. Co-pay. My neighbor's a builder, but he doesn't answer the phone, "Hello, Twobyfour residence." And you never go to parent teacher conferences to talk with Mrs. Homeroom or Miss Oughtasmackyourkid.

I did know a guy in college we often called Mr. Gas, but it wasn't because his parents ran a filling station.

People are no longer named for their job. But how many of them are driven by it?

Growing up, tons of my friends had dads who were always at work. And when they got home, it was dinner, followed by the paper in their chair. Some of the kids' dads were on the road all the time, never sure if they'd make it to baseball games, holiday shows or piano recitals.

I myself spent seven years running around the globe doing "my job." I talked to people: training customers, solving problems, giving seminars.

I'll admit it was fun seeing the world on someone else's tab — until one day when I found myself in a hotel room on the other side of the earth, trying to figure out if 10 p.m. my time was going to find my daughters asleep or with a mouthful of fruity loops.

Don't get me wrong — I