

Sample Chapters from

**Nose-Sucker Thingees,
Weeds Whacking Back
&
Cats in the Bathtub:
Does Life Get Any Better?**

Chuck Hansen

Also by Chuck Hansen

Build Your Castles in the Air:
Thoreau's Inspiring Advice for Success in Business (and Life)
in the 21st Century

For Stacy

Thank you for my life.

I love you.

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First Edition

Author's note: The events described in these stories are real. Other than the family members, the characters have fictitious names and identifying characteristics.

ISBN 978-0-557-49260-2

Foreword

This book is the result of a lot of work.

But more than that, it is the result of a blessed life. As I re-read these essays, I relived a life that by all rights I do not deserve: Good friends, a one-in-a-million family, two wonderful children, and a beautiful, funny, smart, understanding, loving wife.

All I can say is “thank you” to each of you, and to God for the gift of you and the gift of life. In answer to the question that is part of the title of this book: no, life does not get any better.

I also want to thank the publications in which some of these essays first ran for the opportunity to appear in their pages. These excellent magazines and newspapers include (in alphabetical order): the *Chesterfield Observer*, *Family Style*, *Home Style*, *Richmond Bride* and *Richmond Magazine*.

I hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I enjoyed living it, and then writing about it. Take care.

Chuck Hansen

June 20, 2010

Midlothian, Virginia

Finding a Pediatrician

They know me, the minute I walk in. The receptionist and nurses at the pediatrician's office – they've seen my type.

But I don't care. I'm not the one working in pandemic-central.

I refuse the pen at the sign-in pad. *Thanks, I brought my own pen*, I mumble, careful not to inhale, as I use my elbow to pull the clipboard toward me.

Think about it. A hundred sick kids have come through that door ahead of you, and one hundred sick kids' moms or dads, slick-fingered from the virus-infested nastiness oozing or spurting from their kid's head, have

gripped that ball point pen to sign in. I wouldn't touch that thing if it were at the end of a remote-control robot arm on the moon and I was sitting at Mission Control.

You've seen me, too. I'm the parent who has his kid bolted to the waiting room chair. I won't let him play with the spit-shined germ vehicles (sometimes called "toys"), read the books or even touch the armrests on the chair.

"Daddy, I'm bored," my child whines, his barely reigned hands fidgeting in his lap.

"Here's something you can do," I reply. "Count how many times that kid playing with the blocks picks his nose."

If they had loudspeakers out in the parking lot I'd wait out there. I don't care if it is 16 degrees and sleeting. A pediatrician's waiting room is a giant Petri dish with picture books.

I'm sure I am considered a "problem parent." But I'm not changing – at least, not without a significant bump in my meds - so I had to hunt for a doctor who wasn't a "problem pediatrician."

I wasn't always successful. For example, I remember a pediatrician who refused to use one of those ball suction thingies to clear our infant daughter's nasal congestion.

You know what I'm talking about: it looks like a sawed-off turkey baster. You stick the pointy end up your kid's nose (AFTER squeezing out all the air) and then let

go. The suction pulls everything short of brains out of your kid's head. Like magic, your kid is breathing again and you're wondering if you could use it for a sinus headache.

Anyway, young Dr. Idealist didn't believe in this elegant device (I'm still not sure why). Instead, he took a syringe full of saline and jammed it up one nostril (of the child), then violently squeezed the plunger. This forced a flood of fluid up one side of the nasal passages, around a turn somewhere up there, and out the *other* nostril, pushing all that nasty junk out ahead of it.

The first time he did this to my one-week-old daughter, her eyes popped WIDE open, and she spent the next hour cursing a baby blue streak.

Despite our misgivings, we tried the method at home - once. Our little girl gave us look that said *do that one more time and the first day I can walk I'm going to come beat you with a baby xylophone*. We threw away the syringe and swore an oath never to tell the nose Nazi that we'd gone back to the ball.

When our two-year-old son took to crying when he was put to bed, the pediatrician described in patronizing tones how we should simply leave our son to cry himself to sleep, no matter how much he (the child) screamed. The pediatrician had the cool detached expertise of the

guy who yaps about what war is like, but who's never been *in* a war.

"Do you have kids?" I finally asked.

Pause. "Not yet," he stammered.

OK.

So during an interview for a *new* pediatrician, it was nice to hear this: "You need to let him cry. But I'll tell you now: it's going to be *hard*. Really hard."

"Do you have kids?" I asked this new doc. She smiled and nodded.

"Did they ever cry at night?" I continued.

"Are you kidding?" this pediatrician said, laughing. "All three of mine had colic their first two years."

Now *that's* the kind of pediatrician I can rally behind. Not one who is a parent, necessarily – but one who realizes how hard it sometimes is to *be* a parent. Even a problem parent.

Experts Say Smooth Sailing Ahead... or Not...

I've had enough expert advice.

In 2004 it was, "Buy, buy, buy!" In 2008 it became, "Sell, sell, sell!"

In 2008: "Gas is going to \$5!" In 2009: "Gas is going to stay under \$2!"

Prior to September: "We need to save more, or the economy's going to tank!" Now: "We need to spend more, or the economy's going to tank!"

The "experts" aren't making it easy to save for retirement, decide whether to buy a car with better mileage or plan a family budget.

It reminds me of an incident from my indiscreet youth. When I was 25, a friend wrangled us crewing positions on a 53-foot sailboat crossing the Atlantic, from the Caribbean to the Mediterranean. Being an amateur sailor, I listened closely to Dimitri, our young captain, to be sure I did all the right things. He was the expert.

One of Capt. Dimitri's most repeated rules was that ships under sail have the right of way over ships under engine power. Early one morning near Gibraltar, I was sailing through a shallow blanket of fog, the sun shining just above the clouds as my crewmates slept below. I scanned the edge of the fog for ships. Ahead, clear. Port, clear. Stern, clear. Starboard, clear. Ahead, clear. Port, huge ship. Stern, clear. Starboard, cl...

Huge ship? I looked again. A mile away, an enormous, 600-foot cargo vessel was materializing from the fog like a ghost ship, its bow pointed just ahead of us.

I thought to yield the right of way, but Dimitri's rule was clear. So I called in Dimitri for an expert opinion. Dimitri climbed up scowling through the companionway, took one look at the approaching ship, and said, "He's going to pass ahead of us." Turning back below, he added, "Don't change course."

So I sailed on. I know...but I was an amateur. On something this important I didn't trust myself over the expert.

The cargo ship's captain apparently had not heard of Dimitri or his rules, though, and soon the ship was less than a quarter mile away, and frighteningly large. Finally I threw expert opinion overboard and turned the wheel, conceding the right of way. As the monstrous bow cut across our path, I looked up at the crew - like looking at a movie screen from the first row - and they looked down, making little gestures with their little arms.

Soon the wake reached us, tossing the sailboat violently. The commotion brought Dimitri stalking back up the ladder to chew me out. "I told you to never yield the right of way under sail!" he yelled, oblivious to the close encounter under way.

Wordlessly I pointed forward at the ship, a stone's throw away with your weak arm. Dimitri turned, craned his neck to an unnatural angle, and then turned back, still scowling but not missing a beat, "...except this time!" Then he retreated down the companionway ladder and never mentioned the incident again.

It would have been easy to cave to expert opinion. In fact, the gravity of the situation made me trust Dimitri's opinion more, rather than risk my crewmates' lives on my meager knowledge. Thankfully, I trusted myself instead.

Expert opinion is valuable, but don't forget that it was the experts who created the situation we're in now. So get expert opinions... but in the end, trust yourself.



Chuck Speaks!

Speaker, writer and humorist Chuck Hansen uses funny stories of adventure and business expertise to help organizations & their people rediscover balance, perspective & the pleasure of life...

Chuck brings his positive and funny message to senior leadership meetings, company retreats, association conferences and awards events. His clients range from Fortune 500 companies to professional associations to small businesses to non-profit organizations.

TM

Chuck pulls from a life of adventure...

Copier salesman, stand-up comic, blackjack dealer, private detective, substitute teacher, bouncer in a Caribbean saloon, donut maker, crewmember on a 53-foot sloop crossing the North Atlantic, cigarette

factory tour guide, bartender, retail salesperson, daycare teacher, and waiter (for two hours)...

And broad business success...

Executive speechwriter with three Fortune 500 companies, press secretary to a member of Congress, speechwriter for a Virginia governor, author of *Build Your Castles in the Air: Thoreau's Inspiring Advice for Success in Business (and Life) in the 21st Century*, and humor columnist.

Chuck has three goals:

1. Entertain and enlighten his audience, whether it's for a corporation, company, association, non-profit or awards event.
2. Make the preparations as stress free as possible for the meeting planner by being early, low-maintenance and dependable.
3. Help the meeting planner and speaker-selection team look GREAT for choosing Chuck to present!

Hiring Chuck

To hire Chuck for an upcoming speaking opportunity or a freelance writing assignment, contact him by phone or email:

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Testimonials

"I attended the social work conference in Williamsburg and heard you speak. Your message was great and what a delivery!!"

- C. Moore, Virginia Department of Social Services

"We so enjoyed having you with us last week. I've heard nothing but rave reviews!"

- T. Henderson, International Association of Administrative Professionals

"I personally wanted to thank you for a very movingTM and humorous commencement speech. Your words hit home about keeping up with what society wants us to have versus what we want for ourselves. I wanted to let you know that you have opened my eyes."

- T. Moore, DeVry University graduate

"Chuck's program provided a "mini-vacation" from the troubles of the world and gave us a chance to laugh and recharge our batteries."

- L. Gilreath, Chesterfield Chamber of Commerce

"Chuck Hansen has a way of delivering a very important message in an entertaining and fun way! I enjoyed every minute of his program. It was insightful, motivating, and absolutely hilarious!"

- A. Moore, TECHEAD

"With the state of the country and world today, economic changes, etc., your motivational speech was much needed. Your thoughts and insights could not have come at a more perfect time."

- K. Ainsley, Suffolk City Treasurer's Office

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- Michelle Mercurio, DeVry University

"Chuck's presentation skills were exceptional, and he really connected with the audience."

- Kate Turner, Capital One Financial Literacy Program

Hiring Chuck

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