

A Father's Footsteps

Steven R. Perkins

Lulu Press
Morrisville, North Carolina

A Father's Footsteps

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means - electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other - except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the author.

Cover design by Melissa Perkins
Cover photo by Steve Perkins

Copyright © 2006 by Steven R. Perkins

ISBN 978-1-4303-0980-2

Published by Lulu Press
960 Aviation Pkwy
Morrisville, NC 27560

Printed in the United States of America

To Austin and Olivia...

*may you always know who you are by knowing
Whose you are as you walk in the footsteps of your
Father in heaven*

One

It was one of those company golf junkets in Myrtle Beach where they comp just about everything, including a wife for the night if you're discrete in how you ask for it, that I have come to mark as my true birthday. Actually, it was more like the beginning of three months of labor.

On the last day of the five day trip, some of the others had decided to stay on at their own expense through the weekend. I was going to head back to New York that night. Friends joke that my middle initial stands for "Free," and after having spent five perfect days playing perfect rounds of golf on one of many perfect courses in South Carolina, there was no way I was going to spend one penny of my own money on such a waste.

You see, I had a nearly flawless game, and I hated it. Every drive was smack down the middle 240, never more than 260, unless a slight fade or draw was what the doctor ordered, and then I produced exactly that. The other guys in the group could out drive me with shafts longer than their imaginations and feather-light titanium heads bigger than their own egos, but by about the third or fourth hole, their confidence was usually on the brink. As they cussed their way out of the rough and sand, I soft-landed green after green in regulation. When they kissed and fondled and performed other questionable moves with their putters, I rolled each one to a familiar click in the heart of the cup. If I saw that one of the new guys was becoming particularly unglued too early in the round, I might actually squat down and hold up my putter to pretend checking the line.

And new guys were usually who I played with. Nobody from the company was a particularly close friend, so when they had discovered after a round or two that they were playing the human version of Iron Byron, they made up excuses not to play, or told me what I could do with myself, which left me with a revolving door of newbies on junkets like this.

Just after dawn on the last morning of a week of perfectly free golf played perfectly, I was on the range swinging effortlessly through drive after drive, landing them no less than 240, no more than 260, utterly disgusted. As I stared at the last ball in the bucket, I had had enough. I slammed my driver back into the bag, but as I started tugging the cover over the modestly sized head, a minor

rebellion flashed through my mind with all the guns-blazing glory of a South American revolution. I snatched the sock off that club, teed up the last ball, and just ripped the cover off of it. I didn't even bother to see where it landed as I hefted my bag onto my shoulders. A few muscles I had never used in a golf swing announced their presence with a slight burning sensation, and it felt good.

"Mm, mm, mm! Reminds me of ol' Jimbo." I snapped out of my mostly irritated, slightly excited blank stare and saw the club pro standing on the veranda steps while the college kids in starched white shorts and crisp hunter green shirts were setting up the table umbrellas. He was dressed the same as they were, but the pro clearly did not belong among the college crew. Strong forearms rippled with muscles that had been developed on the course, not in a gym, and strands of gray hair obscured a tattoo on his left arm. Lots of people these days sport body art, but this was a simple tat in green ink, the kind that men used to get before it was chic for a woman to get a red rose on her ankle. He delivered his smile through deep lines that radiated across his leathery face

I smiled back. "Say what?"

"Oh, nothing." He grinned fondly, but it was difficult to tell if he were actually smiling at me, given his memory-lost stare out in the direction of where my ball must have landed. "Just reminded me of ol' Jimbo. A guy I used to know."

I followed his gaze for a moment and watched as another member of the crew drove the ball catcher around the range. The most brilliant color was still in the morning clouds and not yet in the hibiscus and azaleas. "Yeah, well, 'Drive for show and putt for dough,' right? Drives like that aren't what win."

He turned, and though his smile never faded, the sharp morning light refused to let me turn my face from his. "You know, I've heard and given that advice for more decades than you've been alive, but I'll tell you this. Sometimes what you've been taught is winning, isn't. In fact, it can stand in the way of a kind of losing that's really the true victory."

I watched for a moment as the solid silver hair above the hunter green shirt walked purposefully toward the practice greens. I wasn't entirely sure what he had meant, but I filed it away to think on later. It was time for breakfast and the trip's final round.

...

I'm an account executive in New York for an up and coming software company. Basically, I am a business pimp. I get us into as many beds, which is to say deals, as I can, hoping to attract the attention of some major suitor who will marry, or buy us out so we can all live happily ever after. The quality of what I do is matched only by my golf game, and I feel the same way about it.

You might be starting to think that my story is one long complaint, but not really. I'm engaged to a fantastic woman, Veronica, and the nights when we get

to see each other, which is most of the time, make the days worth getting through. Yes, that implies that we aren't living together. Now, I know what you're thinking. This guy has a job and a golf game that I would love, but that he hates. On top of that, he isn't getting any action. His life really does suck. But that's not the case.

The Georgia Satellites once recorded a song that said, "Don't give me no lines, and keep your hands to yourself." Well, that's how it is with Veronica, a drop dead gorgeous brunette whose face was the envy of cosmetic company models. She comes from a wealthy family, but never flaunts daddy's money. Instead, she works with a small art gallery on the west side and directs programs to enrich the cultural experience of inner-city kids. In short, she is a knockout who knows exactly who she is and doesn't need to do anything she absolutely does not want to. Which means she does not need to hop in the sack with any martini swilling jerk or foo-foo drink club hopper just to feel good about herself. This also means that when she did want to marry someone, me, that lucky guy felt like the king of the world. Don't get me wrong, she has given all the signs that married sex will be better than all the action I ever got in college or watched on Skinemax. In fact, I even cancelled the old cable channels recently. It's not that I'm whipped, a technical impossibility since I am not actually getting any action. Sounds strange, I admit, but in a way I almost want to be more like her, with more respect for myself than to need cheap thrills just to endure a look in the mirror, something those thrills never seemed to produce anyhow.

The weekend back in New York did not improve my mood much after Myrtle Beach. It was raining, and I had to endure a motion sickness-producing ride from the airport back to my apartment. Veronica was off at an art convention in Dallas and would not be back until Wednesday. So I sat there, watching the Golf Channel for two days straight and wondering who Jimbo was and what that club pro had been talking about when he said that losing was really winning.

Monday was complete disengagement. No matter how much I hated my own sickeningly predictable if successful game, I had to feel grateful about spending a week golfing next door to the ocean. No corner office, no matter how spacious could compare, and mine was not even that, located as it was smack in the middle of the twenty-third floor. I read, then saved as new, all one hundred thirty-seven email messages that had collected in my in-box from the previous week. It was still a couple hours before I could remotely justify an early lunch, and I had no idea what to do.

On a whim I went to the Myrtle Beach club's website, and after clicking through countless pictures that anyone who had not actually been there would have sworn were digitally enhanced, I finally found the contact section of the site. I was not overly hopeful that the club pro would have an email address. On the one hand, clubs like this catered to the young and business crowds, so it was not surprising that they would have a website, complete with online reservation

and e-store where you could buy your own hunter green shirts with club emblem. On the other hand, the pro had struck me more as a throwback to a different time and place. He represented golf, the game itself, not the commercial, corporate logo, color-coordinated, tennis and pool thrown-in getaway that so many clubs had become. I wondered if he even knew how to log on.

After I clicked on the link for *probob@myrtledunes.com* next to the smiling headshot of Bob Francis-Club Pro, I watched as the email window opened with his address in the "To:" window and the cursor blinking in the "Subject:" box. We have a decent spam blocker at work, but I still have the practice of deleting anything that comes from an unknown address, unless the subject line clearly communicates it is something I should open. No matter how personal a title like "Michael Anderson: Your Credit Report" might sound, it earns an automatic delete, much like any title that is in all capitals. A subject like "Johnson from Microtech" will get opened, even if I do not recognize the address, because Microtech is one of our biggest distributors. So, on the off chance that Bob Francis actually checked his emails, I wanted to choose an appropriate subject title. I finally settled on "E-Logistics Company Trip." Hopefully he would remember us, since the last group flew out only late Sunday afternoon.

I easily deal with sixty emails a day. The only reason I had a paltry one hundred thirty-seven waiting for me that Monday was that I had not been responding to them as they came in, thus inviting more responses. Within seconds I can crank out a message that sounds for all the world as if I really care about the content, but this one was different. First of all, I felt foolish writing a guy I did not know about a throw-away comment he probably did not remember. Second, I was not sure myself why I was writing.

To: *probob@myrtledunes.com*
From: *manderson@elogistics.com*
Subject: *E-Logistics Company Trip*

Bob,

I had the pleasure of playing your course last week as part of the E-Logistics conference. The course was in top condition and the whole team had a great time.

You may not remember this, but as I finished a bucket on the practice range early Friday morning, you said that my last shot reminded you of someone. Jimbo, I think you called him. You also made an interesting comment about winning and losing. Anyway, I was just curious if there were a story behind this. For some reason his name has stuck with me.

Thanks again to the whole crew at Myrtle Dunes.

Sincerely,

*Michael F. Anderson
Account Executive
E-Logistics
1480 Wall Street
New York, NY 10020
Phone: 210.555.1280
Fax: 210.555.1285*

When I finally hit "Send," I was still in no mood to work, but at least it was close enough to a reasonably early lunch that I could leave the building and try to clear my head. Given the weather that showed no sign of letting up, the effort was doomed from the outset.

Tuesday and Wednesday were at least productive, which is the highest measure of praise a driven, controlling, type-A personality can give anything. It turned out that Magnum Sports, the largest chain of sporting goods stores in the South and the company who had hosted our junket in Myrtle Beach, was impressed with what they had seen of our new software. Our people had come up with this great program that not only tracked inventory, sales, and all that good stuff, but could also help a company find out so much information about the kinds of people who bought their products that it was questionable whether it were legal. Actually, our legal guys made sure we were within the law on that, but just barely. Anyway, Magnum Sports seemed to like what they saw. Anything to help them more precisely target a twelve-year old and make his dad think the kid absolutely needed a hundred dollar titanium bat. For some reason, though, what they really liked was me.

I know I have sounded a bit cynical up to this point, but I can be a quite charming guy when need be. After all, I did manage to persuade a woman like Veronica to marry me. I actually don't know what I did to make her say yes, but at least in the business world, I can sell just about anything related to computers. I had been the one to target Magnum Sports and start making the connections, so naturally I had been a key player in the Myrtle Beach meetings.

Typically it is the designers who make the biggest splash at these things, showing off all the whiz-bangs of their latest creations. For some reason the two design guys who went with us were the nerdiest of the whole bunch. They probably got jock itch just from channel surfing past ESPN. They were embarrassingly amused with some of the tricks of their own software, for example, the complete purchasing history of a customer that could be accessed by entering the customer's phone number. I cringed as they role played a scenario in which one of them was a Magnum Sports clerk and the other was a female customer. The "clerk" goofily asked, "So, Miss Roberts, how did you like

those titanium workout weights you bought last month?" As they laughed themselves silly, probably at the prospect that either one of them would ever have the chance to ask a sports chick any question at all, the Magnum Sports guys looked at me with are-these-guys-nuts expressions. Clearly the "clerk" did not have a clue that titanium was used to make sports equipment *lighter*, but had picked up the word somewhere and thought he'd throw it in.

In the end, it was my own fairly solid understanding of the software along with my ability to act like a human being that won the day. They liked our product because I presented what it could do in practical ways to improve their business, rather than enact fantasies about how to score with women. That Tuesday and Wednesday back in New York, I was consumed with reading and answering emails from the Magnum Sports guys, forwarding relevant messages on to higher ups at E-Logistics, faxing various financials to various people who had something intelligent to say about them, and generally performing all the trades of which it seemed I was jack.

Wednesday had the additional benefit of being the day Veronica came home, and though it was still raining, the thought of meeting her at the airport for a romantic cab ride to a late dinner did not even hold the prospect for the motion sickness I had endured returning from Myrtle Beach. I started to make reservations once, but decided against it. I had done this a lot in the early days of our relationship, but thanks to her I had slowly learned the pleasure of serendipitously finding some out of the way Italian or Chinese place that neither of us had heard of and that always managed to create just the right atmosphere for forgetting the rest of the human race even existed.

As I got ready to head home for a shower and the early news before going to the airport, I checked the emails one last time. This type-A might have been softening around Veronica, but not at work. At the top of the In-box I found:

probob@myrtledunes.com
Re: E-Logistics Company Trip

I quickly settled back into my chair and opened it. Looking back, it is amazing that something that happened at work excited me even more than the prospect of dinner with Veronica.

To: *manderson@elogistics.com*
From: *probob@myrtledunes.com*
Subject: *Re: E-Logistics Company Trip*

Dear Mr. Anderson,

Glad to hear that you and your company had a good time. We hope you will enjoy our club again sometime.

Yes, I do remember you from the range. I may forget my children's names, but I never forget a swing. Yours was dead on for a guy I used to know named James McGinness. We always called him Jimbo. Anyhow, there was something about the spirit of your swing that I had not seen since Jimbo's, and it caught my attention.

Please let us know if we can do anything to help you set up another golf outing.

*Bob Francis
Teaching Pro
Myrtle Dunes Golf and Tennis Resort*

I sat staring at the screen. If the alarm on my cell phone had not gone off, I might have missed the plane and dinner altogether. My eyes were fixed on two words. James McGinness. Back and forth I read them, over and over, then took them in as a unit. James McGinness. My father.

