

THE TATTOO

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Homecoming takes us back

By MOLLY HORAN
The Tattoo

It's seven o'clock on homecoming night and most of our classmates are getting dressed in their shiny pink dresses and doing their part to destroy the ozone layer.

My friends Sam, Lenya and I are regressing 10 years.

Which to watch: *Aladdin* or *Pocahontas*? *Aladdin* wins.

Soon we're sucked into a two-dimensional Agrabah surfacing only for the occasional Skittle or comment.

"I wish there were guys at our school who would take us a magic carpet ride."

"I wish there were really genies that could grant us three wishes."

"I wish I had a monkey," Sam said.

It's 8:30 and we've gone through two bags of gummy worms, one away from slipping into sugar comas.

Now for *Pocahontas*.

What I say

I wonder what would have happened if she hit the canoe when she jumped off the waterfall. Would John Smith still have loved her if she was a quadriplegic?

And was she really so in touch with nature that she could communicate with all the animals

and the trees, or was she just lonely and needed someone to talk to? They didn't have chat rooms back then.

It's 9:30 and after three bags of gummy worms, gummy worm pizza seems like a good idea.

Gummy worm pizza, we later discovered, is not a good idea.

It's time for *Mulan* - a good movie, but we're growing tired of the predictable, Disney ending.

She brings home some trinkets of her victory to her father, a sword and some armor. Not very original. What about the head of a Hun or a t-shirt that says, "My daughter saved China from a hostile takeover and all I got was this shirt"?

Now that would have been a nice change of pace. By 10:30, we were getting ready to leave while trying to convince each other that it's physically impossible to overdose on Skittles.

Sometimes it's nice to skip a high school function and go back to a kindergarten state of mind. Just skip the paste. There are some things you just shouldn't relive.



Justin Skaradosky / The Tattoo

He conceived a birth control clock

By ZACH BROKENROPE
The Tattoo

Timing is everything. For couples who want a child - or who want to avoid pregnancy - knowing when the woman is fertile is critical.

As a designer at The Sessions Clock Co. in Forestville, John Paul Jones Jr. helped create The Lady Sessions, a clock designed to track a woman's menstrual cycle.

"I'd never heard of anything like it before," said Jones.

Sessions created "The Lady," billed as the world's first "family planning" clock, for the sole purpose of counting a woman's menstrual cycle, according to Chris Bailey, curator at the American Clock and Watch Museum.

"In 1965 it was first announced," said Bailey. But the clock didn't have much production time, because Sessions closed in 1968.

To use the clock, a woman would set that clock to her specific period. Then, during the days she was most fertile, a small dial on the clock would turn red.

Because the rest of the month posed less of a danger of pregnancy, Bailey joked that the dial ought to appear green on those days.

"Everyone thought it was great," said Jones.

According to Jones the women who worked at Sessions thought the idea of the clock was wonderful.

"We all thought it would take hold," Jones said. "I thought it was a good idea."

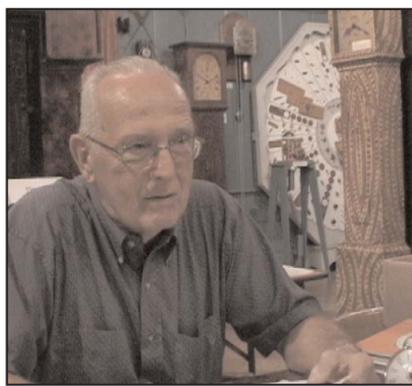
At Sessions, Jones helped design and create "The Lady."

"It was a new experience," Jones said. Jones said the company's chief engineer gave him the assignment.

Jones helped design the motor, he said, so the clock could have a Sessions movement. His work ensured that the colored "flags" inside the clock that appeared in the indicator window popped up at the right time.

"It was very easy to do," Jones said.

An electric clock, The Lady Sessions also served as an alarm clock. It was packaged with a fertility table showing the probable fertile days based on the length of a men-



Zach Brokenrope / The Tattoo

John Paul Jones Jr. at the American Clock and Watch Museum in Bristol.

strual period.

"This remarkable clock accommodates the cycle variance of the vast majority of women," reads the Sessions literature included with the clock. "It indicates probable safe days and probable days of fertility all through the month ... just as dependably as it tells the time all through each day!"

The clock uses "the medically accepted rhythm method," the information from Sessions says.

While it was certainly an unusual concept, the clock generated some controversy.

"The Catholic church was upset about it because they considered it birth control," said Bailey.

For Jones, Sessions was an early stepping stone in a mechanical career after a two-year stint in the U.S. Navy.

"I was hired by chance," he said. "I came in and interviewed, they liked me, and they hired me."

A Waterbury native, Jones had come back to Connecticut after his time in the military, met his wife and started a family.

The Sessions Clock Co., which by that time had already been open for more than a century, was a premier clock company based in

Forestville.

"I was hired to work on motors and clocks," he said.

"At first I did a lot of case design, though," he said as he pulled a large pile of papers out of a box on the table. Each piece of paper had a picture of a clock, and Jones proudly pointed out the ones he designed.

Jones said he enjoyed working at Sessions, a place he described as like a family. He said the company was ahead of its time because women and men worked side by side without differences in the jobs they did.

In the 1960s, Jones quit Sessions for a time and began working for Royal, a typewriter company, as a draftsman.

He said he made the move because he needed "to advance himself." After leaving Royal, Jones returned to Sessions and began working on a new program at the company called PIP.

Jones said PIP was an "audiovisual presentation system" used for education.

"I enjoyed everything I did," Jones said of his time at the company. "We [the employees] all had a good relationship."

Jones remained at Sessions for a short time again, before moving on to other jobs.

Today, Jones, 71, is retired. He and his wife live in Bristol, where they enjoy watching their grandchildren grow up.

Recording history

In cooperation with the American Clock and Watch Museum in Bristol, *The Tattoo* is helping to collect oral histories from former clock factory workers like John Paul Jones, Jr.

A story about Mary D'Alesio, who worked at the E. Ingraham Co., ran on Oct. 3. It is also available online at www.ReadTheTattoo.com.

Any former factory workers willing to share their stories are encouraged to contact the museum at (860)583-6070.

When Alex Briner ran away

By ZACH BROKENROPE
The Tattoo

Nothing ever happens in Aurora, Nebraska. So when Alex Briner ran away, it was big news.

"I heard he ran away in the middle of the night, stole his old man's car."

"No way dude, he hitchhiked to GI and took a bus."

"I hear he's one of those Wal-Mart kids; you know, the ones with their pictures in the entrance."

Gossip flew, and by the end of the first week the agreed upon story was that Alex had stolen an airplane and flown to some South American country where it's legal to smoke pot.

But somehow, as things often do, the true story of Alex Briner was lost in the fantasy. Those of us who knew him knew that he had hated Aurora; and those of us who knew him well had known he had always planned to leave. He just finally got the guts to do it.

"He's in Chicago, that's where he's from," said Todd.

Alex had moved to Aurora from Chicago at the end of ninth grade, and sworn his allegiance to the city ever since.

"Naw, man, Alex is way too smart to go there. That's the first place they'll look for him," dismissed Nolan.

It was Sunday and two weeks after Alex had left when Drew, Nolan, Todd, and I sat in a

booth at McDonalds and gave our theories.

"So what actually happened?" I asked. I had known Alex pretty well, but not well enough to call him a good friend.

"Well, according to Sam..." Drew began, brushing his hair out of his eyes.

We collectively groaned.



In our experience, Sam isn't the most reliable guy in the school.

"Yeah, but he was Alex's best friend," Todd pointed out.

"Anyways," Drew continued, "Sam says that he left his house about three and got a ride to GI with someone. He went to the Greyhound

station by Howard Johnson and left on a bus at four."

"That's it?" I asked, disappointed. I had secretly harbored the hope that the South American pot dream had been what happened. It was much more exotic.

"Pretty much," said Drew.

"So where do you think he is now?" I asked the group. They had known him much better than I had.

"I'd say Canada," Nolan offered. "He has a thing for Canadian chicks."

"No," Drew interjected, "I bet Cali. It's hot out there."

"He dresses in all black," I said.

"True."

"I think it's kinda cool that he did it," I said. "I mean, most guys, we just talk about leaving here. Running away and not looking back. But man, he did it."

There's a moment of quiet.

"Do you think he's having a good time?" Todd asks.

"I'm sure he's having a hell of a time," Nolan says.

We go back to eating our soggy fries, but you can tell that we're all thinking about Alex.

Alex sitting on a beach, his pale skin burned; Alex in Chicago, walking with his black coat tight to his body as he passes by the skyscrapers; and Alex, far away from this McDonalds in the middle of nowhere, living free.

A month of sacrifice and self-control

By EDREES KAKAR
The Tattoo

Ramadan is a month of sacrifice, prayer and clean living - and I and my fellow Muslims look forward to it each year.

For us, it is a holy month, a precious, enjoyable and happy time that brings us closer to God.

Ramadan comes in the ninth month of the lunar Islamic calendar, which means it is at a different time each year. This year, it began Oct. 5 and ends Nov. 3 with a big feast day called Eid al-Fitr.

During Ramadan, Muslims all over the world fast during daylight hours.

At about age 12 or 13, we are expected to observe the fast, but younger children do fast some days of the month on their own. They like to see if they can do it.

The most important reason we fast is to bring equality between rich and poor and to foster empathy for the poor, who are too often living in hunger or with food shortages.

Most people are friendlier and more generous with the poor during Ramadan, and those of us in Muslim countries take this time of year very seriously. We believe that we must be very kind and not get angry during Ramadan and if we do, that we're breaking the rules of Islam.

When we are fasting, we wake two



Edrees Kakar / The Tattoo

A tray of sweets prepared for Ramadan

or three hours before dawn and eat delicious foods for energy, with water or tea so we're not thirsty all day.

At dawn, there are the Fajr, or morning prayers and fasting begins. During the fast, all food and drink - even water - are prohibited. Smoking is also not allowed.

We can cope with being hungry during the fast. It's more of a problem

when people get thirsty, but almost everyone can easily complete the fast. Most people never complain about hunger or thirst.

People who are ill, though, do not have to fast. They can complete the fasting days when they are well again.

To keep our minds off the fast, my friends and I start a soccer game a couple hours before the fast ends. We find that we can run faster during Ramadan because our stomachs are empty and we are lighter. Somehow, playing gives us energy.

We play until about 10 minutes before we can eat and then everyone goes to their own home.

Fasting isn't limited to physical nourishment, however. The idea isn't only to stop eating and drinking, but also to keep your hands, eyes and thoughts from any kind of illegal or sinful activity.

We're expected to control ourselves and not insult anyone and behave in a very kind, generous and friendly manner with younger children as well as elders. To our parents, we're to adopt a special attitude of kindness.

Even crossing international borders is different during Ramadan, according to Saeed Bashir, 16, of Kabul, Afghanistan.

Bashir, who recently crossed into Pakistan for a visit, said there can be a kind reaction from anyone in any place during Ramadan, even when

crossing the border.

In addition, Bashir said the poor benefit from charity given during Ramadan and everyone gets a chance to taste a variety of dishes during this holy month.

Ramadan is special to us because we believe that it was during this month in the year 610 that the Archangel Gabriel started revealing the Koran to the prophet Muhammad.

Each night after breaking the fast,

During Ramadan, Muslims all over the world fast during daylight hours.

we go to the mosque for prayers called Tarawih, where parts of the Koran are recited, and when it is over, we have a ceremony called Khatim and some special desserts. By the end of the month, we've read the entire Koran.

The first eating to break the fast is called Iftar, which we do at dusk, at the time of our Mughrib prayers.

The most famous and valuable fruit for breaking the fast is dates, because it is believed that Muhammad ate them, too. But eating dates isn't mandatory. We just eat a little bit of something and have a drink, then we pray for a few minutes before starting the main course that has a delightful variety of dishes.

In my native Afghanistan, we enjoy traditional dishes as well as jams, sauces, different milk products, yogurts, different snack fries, and special South Asian sweets called jilabees.

Afghan-style rice, called kabuli palow, is a main course almost every night for nearly every family. It's made with lots of oil, slices of carrots and raisins.

Chicken and fried potatoes are also popular.

Eighteen-year-old Nazeer Ahmed from Peshawar, Pakistan said fasting is the occasion of joy and love among the people. In the family, Ahmed said, everyone takes part in preparing or helping to bring something tasty to eat to make the meal wonderful.

For me and hundreds of millions of my fellow Muslims around the world, Ramadan is a month with blessings, prayers, fasting and charity.

After the 30 days of Ramadan, we have Eid al-Fitr, which is several days of celebration and happiness, with new clothes and feasting day and night.

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