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Keith Long

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## YUCKY SHORTS

*Keith Long*

June is the month that Vacation Bible School springs up all over western Oklahoma. Or at least it did when I was a kid. And VBS was a universally fun time for me, except for one particular year.

When I was seven years old, Doug Henton invited me to Fifth Street Baptist's VBS. Since I played first base for the First Baptist PeeWees, and Fifth Street was our arch-rival, it seemed chaotic to me to go to their VBS. But Mother must've known more than I did. She made me go, at least on Monday, since Doug had been nice enough to ask me. I went, feeling conspicuous and hoping nobody would notice me as the kid who had struck out in the second inning the week before, swinging at a hopper pitch, one that doesn't reach the plate until the second hop. As luck would have it, nobody even mentioned baseball. What's more, I had a great time. We got to play outside a lot, and I made this white-plaster thing of my own hand, and we sang some songs I already knew, and Doug took me on a tour of the whole church.

I came home that Monday full of enthusiasm for Fifth Street's VBS, especially the green punch and cookies, and told Mom that I had seen Billie Richards, our neighbor, there. Then I related what we were going to do on Tuesday and began making preparations, even though I had to squeeze in an afternoon at the pool and a baseball game against Presbyterian that night.

Life's rough on a seven-year-old.

The next morning, as I was getting ready for VBS, about an hour and a half ahead of time, Mom came up the stairs with a pair of shorts she wanted me to wear. They were horrid: a madras plaid, with green, pink, blue, and yellow worked into the pattern. What's more, they were hand-me-downs from my cousin Stanley, who had already poisoned me about the shorts.

"They're yucky," he told me, which is a seven-year-old euphemism for geeky, nerdy, icky, and socially unredeemable. When I saw the shorts in Mom's hands, I retreated to my safe haven under my bed.

"They're yucky," I said.

"No, they're not," Mom said. "They're nice. And they're cool, too." Mom meant, of course, that they were airy and comfortable on a hot June day, not that they were "cool," the opposite of "yucky."

"I ain't wearing them," I said. The argument lasted until I was almost late for VBS. I won out that day, wearing my long jeans with the patch on the left knee and some t-shirt. Fifth Street's VBS lived up to its billing on Tuesday. It was great. I learned to play shuffleboard, got along great with my baseball counterparts, and sang in my loudest, most penetrating voice. But lurking above me somewhere was the specter of the madras plaid shorts. I knew the argument wasn't over.

I was right. The next morning, the shorts were on the towel rack when I went into the bathroom. I won again, however, getting to wear jeans on Wednesday and Thursday. But on Friday, the awards day and the day the green punch and cookies were to return, Mom made

her stand. I had to wear the madras plaid shorts or I wasn't going.

I lost.

When Doug and his mom came to pick me up, I gingered my way out onto the front porch, embarrassed by the riot of colors that followed me around. They really were yucky shorts. They had a little, clip-thing to hold them together where the button was supposed to be. And I had to reach almost to my knees to get the zipper started. And the zipper was silver instead of gold.

Yucky.

And worst of all, the pockets were cut so that when I sat down, the whole pair of shorts ballooned into my lap. I looked like I was hiding all my baseball gear in my shorts. I knew the shorts were, altogether, a bad trip. But, bad trip notwithstanding, there was the matter of green punch. Even a kid forced into shorts can't turn that down.

When we arrived at church, I got my second big surprise of the week. Nobody even mentioned my shorts. I even noticed there were other kids — younger though they were — wearing madras plaid shorts. And since I kept my arms crossed and hunkered down when I sat, nobody asked me what was hiding in my shorts. It was great. I was going to wear the shorts Mom forced me to wear, and I wasn't going to be laughed at and ostracized after all, which was obviously her dastardly plan. When we went outside to play, which was the last stage before green punch, I had almost forgotten about the shorts. But then the Oklahoma morning wind caught me and whistled through my legs.

I ran just a bit. I was startled. I had made an important, scientific discovery. The shorts made

me fast. I decided to check it out, and went for a spin around the churchyard. No doubt about it. I ran faster in shorts. The legs didn't bind. My knees didn't catch in the patches. The wind raced against my legs. I was one fast dude.

"Hey, Gerald," I said, yelling at Gerald Bolton who was always faster than me, "wanna race?"

We lined up on the sidewalk and off we went. Despite becoming much faster myself, Gerald began pulling away. But he was wearing shorts, so it was obvious to me that I had no technological advantage. When we came to the corner, I tried to make the turn, but my excessive speed was too much for my main frame and I tripped.

The shorts really were a bad trip.

I pulled all the skin off both knees, rolling it up somewhere around the pelvis. Guerney Bolton took me to the basement where he doctored me with stinging stuff and patched me up with huge hunks of gauze. I was the hero of the green punch party, and everyone wanted to see my injuries. I limped around the whole time, accepting all the green punch everyone was bringing me.

Of course, the injury didn't really bother me until I got home and Mother gasped at my bandages. "You did it! You did it! Oh, it hurts!" I cried, my knees now freely throbbing. "I ain't wearing yucky shorts ever again!" I said.

And I haven't.