



Percy Jackson - All Grown Up
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Published: 2010

Categorie(s): Fiction, Fantasy, Short Stories, Humorous, Media Tie-In, Short Stories, Fan Fiction

Tag(s): "short story" "Percy Jackson" fantasy

Introduction

Percy Jackson and the Olympians

Fan Fiction

by Bruce T. Forbes, 2009

based on the books and having nothing to do with the movie

These short stories need to be read in the order they are placed. These are stories of Percy as an adult and may bore the younger reader. But as a grandfather and Sunday School teacher, these ideas came to mind and so I wrote them. So kids - here's some of what you have to look forward to when you become an adult ...

So What's New at Camp Half-Blood?

(Percy Jackson is about 24 years old)

Formula to start a good day:

One: Set your alarm for 4 AM. When the alarm goes off, be in the water in about five minutes, dressed only in your swimming suit, aegis, and dual-edge knife made of celestial bronze and tempered mortal steel - you never know if the alligator coming up on you is mortal or monster.

Two: Once the hour-long swim is done, and you've survived the gators and monsters, surface and crouch on your favorite rock while you think to yourself '*Fly!*' and hold your breath through the pain of wings instantly growing out your back. But the minute's pain is worth the flight! Besides, it's the only way Zeus allows me into his realm on a normal basis.

Three: Get home in time for the morning news and listen to it while you shower, adjust your face, and get out the door to teach your Special Ed class at the school nestled quietly in the Louisiana bayou.

The name's Jackson. Percy Jackson. Yeah, there were a lot of news stories about me ten years back, but no, I *didn't* explode the bus. I *didn't* destroy the Gateway Arch. And I *didn't* have a shotgun on the Santa Monica beach. Okay, I *did* cause Mount Saint Helens to explode and Los Angeles to burn in an earthquake. But I had help! Besides, L. A. *is* the gateway to Hell!

Here on earth virtually no one knows about the connection between me and Mount Saint Helens and the Los Angeles earthquake. And just as few know about the 'Jackson War', and I'd like to keep it that way! Outside my immediate social circle I'm just Mister Jackson, the Special Ed teacher with remarkable success helping students who have dyslexia and ADHD. I spend a year or two in one school district and then move on. I'd love to settle down, but all this teaching stuff is just a cover for my *real* job. My real job is to seek out students with extremely unique parentage and give them the chance to come to a summer camp with others of the same unique parentage. So, I'm always moving from place to place.

I'm a hero. A demigod hero. Half-human, half-god hero who goes on quests and everything; just like all those Greek heroes they make movies about. I've even been dipped in the River Styx and am more monster- and weapon-resistant than most other heros. You see, the Greek gods really *do* exist... but you've probably read the books that mystery writer guy in Texas wrote about me after talking to my mom and got mostly

correct, so check out the books and get yourself up to speed before reading too much more of this.

Dyslexia and ADHD (Attention-Deficit / Attention Disorder) are the two quickest ways to find other demigods – kids who have a god for one of their parents. A demigod's brain is usually hard-wired to read Greek - hence the dyslexia. And as far as ADHD: they are usually far more wired for action than talk; enough said. Actually, keeping track of monsters and watching who they're trying to eat is a quicker way to find these kids - as long as the monster you're tracking doesn't turn and eat you before you find out who it's actually after. So, I managed to get through enough college to become a Special Ed teacher, thanks to friends like Grover Underwood who would read my textbooks to me as my own dyslexia made school a nightmare! Now I travel the country looking for cousins. How's *your* dyslexia, by the way?

Fast forward to my eighteenth birthday, spent on Olympus. Yeah, Mount Olympus - that's where my dad Poseidon lives along with a whole gaggle of uncles, aunts, cousins, etc, etc. Our grandparents are Titans, though; we'll not talk about where *they* are. The whole clan was still in awe that I helped saved their behinds two years previous in that war they all now refer to as 'Jackson's War.' Thanks – I was the one trying to stop the war; naturally they named it after me. It should be called the '*Kronos Rebellion*' but no one listens to a mere mortal.

Stupid me; I didn't tell you what an aegis is! It's a medallion given to someone to commemorate and reward them for some earth-shakingly important thing they've done - like saving Mount Olympus from a Titan-controlled army of disillusioned gods, monsters, and teen-age summer campers tired of not knowing who their absent parent really is. The aegis I mentioned earlier was given to me by my dad on my eighteenth birthday, and he told me to let any of the gods touch it that wanted to. It only had one emblem on it when he gave it to me – his own trident symbol. But as other gods came over to admire it and touch it, their symbols appeared on it as well.

And that made life a lot more interesting! What they were actually doing was giving me the power to call on *their* powers without actually having to call! Like, every morning when I adjust my face – what I do is push the medallion against my skin so the Narcissus emblem is touching me and think - "I'd like to tweak that chin a little more," or "a little more definition in the chest" and poof! the chin or the chest adjusts the way I'm thinking. I haven't turned myself into some over-muscled dweeb

who looks like he spends his whole life in the gym, but I'm not exactly ashamed of my looks, either.

Zeus got tired of all my requests to fly – he's continually mad at me over several things, so I have to be careful and talk real nice when I want to fly cross-country instead of taking the bus or AMTRAK. So, at this birthday party he smiles as he puts a finger to my aegis (first time I'd ever seen him smile), and now every time I think 'fly', huge feathered wings sprout out my back and I gotta replace yet *another* shirt. I've learned when *not* to think or say that word. Like when I'm traveling by Greyhound or AMTRAK.

Hera's gift was the most interesting. Every time I get watching a pretty skirt a little too closely and my thoughts wander the wrong way, her face comes to mind and all my memories of anger at an absent father surface. *That's* a sure birth control method, because I'm *determined* my children are going to know me, and I *will* be the father who raises them; not someone else. Thank you, Hera.

Aphrodite touched my aegis, too; just before Hera. But Hera did something to Aphrodite's emblem because when I see a pretty woman and touch Aphrodite's emblem to make something romantic happen, Hera's face comes to mind and the woman I'm hoping for walks by not even noticing me. It's like having your mother chaperone your Friday nights! In the long run I'm okay with this as it's got me to where I am now, but there's been a few frustrating moments.

All told I have about fifteen emblems from fifteen different gods on the medallion. I may tell you about some of the others someday.

Speaking of summer camp – yeah, I'm getting to that. I spend my summers as a senior camp counselor at Camp Half-Blood, a summer camp out on the north shore of Long Island for demigod kids who need to learn to protect themselves from all the monsters roaming the earth looking for their next meal, and we demigods are *always* on the menu.

One of the perks of the 'Jackson War' is that as a reward for my services the gods and goddesses made an unbreakable vow to disclose their mortal children, and that makes my job as a case worker a whole lot easier! We already know who the kids are; we just have to wait for their powers to start to manifest themselves and then explain their new life to them and their parents. Did I tell you that one of the reasons Zeus is constantly mad at me is because the gods voted to make his wife Hera the 'Demigod Birth Registrar?' Talk about keeping track of a wandering spouse!

At the start of this year's camp season, I appeared out of the shadows next to the Great House on the back of the biggest, hairiest dog you'll ever see with a brand new camper sitting in front of me, just behind the big dog's neck. Nine-year-old Lula took it pretty calmly when I explained to her and her parents a month previous that according to our records she was the daughter the sea god Poseidon, "which makes you my sister," I explained. (Her mother was single when Lula was born; otherwise it could have been tense family moment.) Although she took the news calmly, she kind of freaked when Mrs. O'Leary, the only tame hellhound on Earth, appeared out of the shadows of the early morning to give us a ride to camp. (Zeus hadn't got back with me as to whether I had clearance to fly on an airplane, so we traveled the only other quick way we could; her parents didn't want her traveling alone, and I didn't want to take forever to get there.) She kissed her mom and dad goodbye and then her father lifted her up to me on the dog's back; some twelve feet in the air. (Fortunately her luggage had been sent Greyhound three days previous.) Mrs. O'Leary then lept back into the shadows and in the next breath we were at Camp Half-Blood.

I'd warned Lula that she'd be greeted at camp by humans, satyrs, nymphs, and the education counselor Chiron – yeah, the same centaur who taught Hercules and all those other demigod heroes way back then. He's been putting up with teenage campers for three thousand years, and that makes him a Hero in my book! Anyway, Chiron was on hand to greet her and hand over her luggage, and she was all wide-eyed at the sight of a half-man, half-horse standing majestically before her wondering eyes.

"You *did* warn her about *Captian* Tyson?" Chiron asked as he squeezed my shoulder in a friendly, welcoming way; "He's down at the beach waiting for the two of you." Tyson, you see, is another of Poseidon's children. And he's a cyclops. A young one, he only stands about twelve feet tall. "And, he's had time to build this young lady her very own bedroom."

"I've never had my own room," Lula half-whispered, her eyes still wide as Grover, my best friend and a satyr, waved as he approached from the direction of the forest, several small satyrs following along and calling him 'daa-aa-dee'".

I had in fact told Lula about Tyson and that he'd be measuring her for all the basic armor pieces and weapons. I explained that a cyclops half-brother was a good thing when it came to basic demigod accessories like pens that turn into swords and wristwatches that turn into shields. We

wandered down to the beach on our way to the camp cabins and Tyson bearhugged me and then threw me in the air, and I let my wings pop out so I could tease him by hovering just out of his reach. He was almost the perfect gentleman in taking Lula's hand and kissing it and welcoming her into the family. Lula wasn't sure of him at first but let him measure her anyway, and he promised the armor would be done within the week as he handed her a knife and sheath that matched my own.

Camp Half-Blood's sleeping cabins used to all be single room cabins, heedless of gender. Oh, and campers sleep in cabins grouped according to whomever their immortal parent is. Our cabin is all decorated with an ocean theme, being Poseidon's cabin and all. I showed Lula how to use the fountain to make a call through the Iris network, and at my urging she called her parents to let them know she'd arrived safely. The leader from one of the other cabins then appeared, explaining that Chiron had sent her to give Lula 'a girl's tour' of the camp while I got some rest. I nodded gratefully and fell into bed while Lula was asking her tour guide - "Do I *have* to have seashells all over my walls?"

"Girl, you're Poseidon's daughter; get used to ocean stuff," was the forthright reply. "I'm in Ares and I'm a *peace activist*..." "

Okay, while I'm napping (I always nap away my first day at camp!), here's a few of the new things Lula saw around the camp that weren't here when I first came:

One of the demands Lula's parents had for letting her come to camp was that I would have a personal hand in getting Lula through camp, and that meant sleeping in the pavilion instead of up at the Great House like most of the counselors my age do - it was her first time away from home. So, Poseidon's cabin finally got remodeled for modesty's sake. Yeah, we're talking Greek gods here, and modesty isn't usually part of the conversation when talking about *that* particular family. But we counselors decided on our own to make the cabins two-roomed by gender and there weren't any lightening bolts that stopped us. It means most cabins were now twice as wide or had second floors added, but it just added to the individuality of each cabin.

When I first came to Camp Half-Blood there was only twelve cabins representing the twelve principle gods - Hades wasn't even represented. Well, Hades *is* represented now (hey, Nico!) along with all the 'minor' gods and goddesses. Hey, if they have to recognize their children then they need a cabin! A few of them like Hera and the sworn-virgin goddesses will never have children needing cabins here, but out of respect there's still a cabin to represent them.

Through my dad Poseidon we talked Hera into allowing us to honor her by turning her cabin into a social gathering place for polite, cultured activities – it's a lot better than just letting it sit empty and idle, and with the threat of Hera watching over said activities, I assure you there's no 'hanky-panky'.

Another change is a lot of people's attitude about Hera. Yeah, the hype about gods having children with every pretty woman they run across make good stories, but Hera is an awesome example of some of the things we *really* should be teaching to a bunch of child and teenage campers! Like, faithfulness in marriage. Like, courtesy and decorum - things our society doesn't even bother to teach anymore. (There's still that punishing of her husband's children thing, though...)

Another change: A lot of our campers come from bad homes - a good number of them are runaways because their parents couldn't handle them. They don't have good parental figures in their lives; especially the year-rounders; the ones who live at camp year-round. After becoming a camp counselor, Chiron and I had a long talk on this subject, and I was insistent that we needed positive father and mother figures for the campers.

What a *real* maternal figure Hesta, goddess of Hearth and Home, turned out to be. Her cabin is a simple room with a fireplace and a couch and a rocking chair - home-made bread and cookies are always ready to eat, and any kid who wants to come and talks to her. Eventually she became known as Nana Hesta, which flattered her to no end.

However, when Chiron grinned and asked me if Mister D was an adequate father figure, I think I spewed the root beer I was drinking about twenty feet. Anything but! I was loud and long about how the next camp director needed to be someone the campers could look up to and respect; could talk to and trust. A father figure. Chiron just stood there, that wise, inscrutable look not giving anything away.

Another change was in the hiring of instructors for the camp. Although the gods can't take a *direct* hand in the lives and trials of demigods, I very carefully read their bylaws and couldn't find *anything* saying they couldn't teach us – they just can't give *direct* help to demigods while on quests. So, we counselors banded together and talked them into doing just that - once Annabeth finished a four-hour historical review of how demigods and heroes through the ages could have done better had they been god-trained (this on the heels of the Jackson War, mind you), they gave in and agreed to a training schedule. (I think the four hours wore them down as much as it did me!) Some of the lessons aren't really worth

much - Narcissus and Aphrodite teaching Self-Esteem isn't much to write home about - but lectures by Poseidon on Oceanography, Hera on Morality and Courtesy, and Demeter on plant husbandry are well-attended, and the campers even pay attention. Pan and Apollo have even started music lessons on classical instruments, and our sing-along nights now have many instruments playing along with the voices.

I also told Chiron that by-laws can be rewritten by a majority vote, and the gods and goddesses *could* have a hand in their childrens' lives if they would get off their behinds and care and that a camp director worth their job would push for it. Again the wise, inscrutable look.

One advantage to having the gods coming and going on a daily basis to teach what little we could talk them into is that Mr. D, camp director, is being watched by the Olympian council a lot closer than before and has had to clean up a lot of his attitude and actually appear to care about his job. His real name, by the way, is Dionysus, god of wine, revelry, and madness, and he's been on a hundred-year probation for going after a nymph Zeus had his eye on and had declared off-limits to everyone else. He hasn't had a drop of wine since he's been here! Maybe when he's gone we'll get a replacement who actually cares about his job! Chiron just smiles secretly whenever I say this; a smile that says too much but not enough. Drives me crazy.

Another change has been in the Defense classes. Sword, Spear, and Archery classes are essential; sure. Ares and Apollo now show up once a week to test the campers and do a lot of macho posturing. Athena and Artemis come on the days those two don't, minus the macho posturing. But meanwhile a lot of these kids live their school years in big cities where sword-fighting is only used against the monsters - there's still high school to survive! Clarisse La Rue, our summer defense teacher and one of Ares' daughters, has introduced basic martial arts and boxing into the curriculum - that should get any of our campers through gym class, at least.

I dragged myself out of bed for supper and found to my pleasure that Lula had already made enough friends that she didn't want to sit at the Poseidon table but did anyway - like she had a choice! During the meal she told me about the alliance she'd already made for Friday's Capture the Flag game and how Chiron had already given her a class schedule and she was going to be in the same classes as some of her new friends. She grouped with her new friends at the evening sing-along and then walked back to the cabin area with them and waved goodbye as she entered our cabin and, waving goodnight to me, closed her door.

Another of the changes we younger camp counselors effected came up three days later, on Sunday. If you've read those books that mystery writer guy wrote about me, you'll know that one of the questions I asked on my first day here at camp was about the gods – about god with a capitol 'G', and that Mr. D refused to go there. Well, through the years I've gone there. As Mr. D said, “... gods, plural, as in, great beings that control the forces of nature and human endeavors; the immortal gods of Olympus. That's a smaller matter.” In the years since being told that I've discovered that god with a capitol “G” is a far bigger matter than Olympus.

We don't shove religion down the campers' throats here, but Sunday is now our day off from classes, and between breakfast and lunch those who want gather in the amphitheater and take turns playing CD's they bring with their favorite worship or inspirational music and sing along. The first week we did it we were worried about lightening, but none ever came (not even a rumble!) so we've kept it up, and most of the campers attend now. Lula, in her starched white Sunday dress, introduced her fellow campers not only to wearing their Sunday Best, but also to the most energetic gospel music most of them had ever heard, and by the end of her CD most of the amphitheater was on their feet swaying, clapping, and shouting 'Amen.'

Like I said, we don't push religion, but we let the campers - especially the year-rounders - know it exists, and everyone who wants joins in and shares. Assuring Lula's parents this was available was one of the deciding factors in allowing her to come to camp.

On Lula's first Sunday at camp she also introduced the concept of the extended family Sunday picnic and sitting around the porch all afternoon and evening, talking and enjoying each other's company. Southern Hospitality at its best. Annabeth Chase got right to work the next day designing and building a porch for the Poseidon cabin – since it *was* a Poseidon camper who introduced the whole idea. After that, Lula was in her element as she served lemonade and cake from her very own porch Sunday after Sunday through the rest of the summer. It only took a few weeks for the rest of the campers to dress up in their best for the event. '*And a little child shall lead them*', or something like that.

And speaking of Annabeth ... She's done nothing but turn into a real woman – a real *pretty* woman. You never see her without that laptop computer Daedalus gave her, though. And her favorite topic of conversation is *always* the latest project she's reviewed on it. Oh, and she's managed her dream of an architectural degree, and with Daedalus' notes she's created some incredible creations. But she says her favorites are all

the new camp cabins and the *serious* remodel job she's proposed for the Great House.

Our romance has bloomed and waned through the years - with me going on quests and searching for students and with her rebuilding Olympus and quests and other stuff, well, stuff has just come up. Besides, she's always been the sort of girl who has to best the boy. Not what I'm after; Love shouldn't be a competition. In the past few years she's been growing out of that, however, so Hope is still there.

About a month into camp this summer, Annabeth and I were sitting on the Poseidon cabin porch one Sunday afternoon, several groups of campers in their Sunday best filling the square in the middle of the cabins, all enjoying the quiet of the afternoon. This was during one of the waning times in our romance and you'd almost think we'd never been serious about each other. Then, in the middle of a long, mostly one-sided conversation about a church she'd designed and was almost completed, she lifted her head from the laptop and asked:

"Why haven't you ever married?"

I set my lemonade and cake down on the end table beside me, leaned forward in my rocking chair, and looked her straight in the eye. "Because the woman I love won't put her laptop down long enough for me to ask her."

Annabeth is *not* a stupid woman - that laptop was shut off and snapped closed and set on the floor of the porch faster than you could say "no power", and I had her complete attention.

"He's goin' do it!" Lula whispered loudly to her little social circle, and then I blushed as the the whole square giggled as I went down on a knee and asked Annabeth to marry me. She said yes!

But I'm getting ahead of myself; something else big happened before the wedding.

Wednesday evening; a week before the wedding: We all come to the food court (yeah, it's the 'dining pavilion,' but I like '*food court*') when the dinner bell sounded. We find the place decorated for a farewell party - festive vines and streamers were hung between the stately Doric columns that define the eating area. There was even a big clock counting down the minutes.

Just as we all returned to our seats after offering food to the folks on Olympus, Chiron cleared his throat and announced that Mr. D's hundred-year confinement to the camp was coming to an end.

"What?!" Annabeth exclaimed from the Athena table; "He's got forty more years...!"

"Zeus, in His eternal wisdom, has decided to parole him to make way for a better-qualified director," Chiron explained. "More of a 'father figure'," and the wise old centaur nodded at me without a hint of emotion on his face.

I nodded back as I thought "About time!" I was thrilled my voice was being heard in this matter.

As exciting as the news was, none of us cheered until Mr. D did, and then we all joined in; some a little too enthusiastically. But for most of us it was definitely a reason to party! He hated the place and hated kids and we all knew it.

With five minutes to go, Mr. D got up as if to make a speech.

Thalia Grace, a daughter of Zeus who was visiting between missions of her own, whispered under her breath as she threw a strawberry into the flames where we all presented gifts to the Olympians - "Please do something, Father!"

The countdown clock suddenly doubled and tripled its speed, and as the minute hand hit ZERO grapes appeared on the vines strung from the columns and wine began pouring itself from the capitols of the Doric columns, and Mr. D was surrounded by a shimmering light. When the light dissipated Mr. D was no longer a pudgy middle-age man but a virile, overly-handsome youth clad only in an oversized fig leaf, his black, curly hair held back by ivy strands, and a wine goblet was in his hand.

"Burgundy," the young, virile youth said to the goblet, and the goblet filled instantly. He brought it to his lips slowly, savoring the moment. Draining the goblet so slowly one could have almost taken a nap before he was done, we all sighed at the enraptured look on his face as he pulled the crystal back from his lips, sighed slowly, and slowly licked his lips and smiled.

"Looks like an addiction issue to me," Lula whispered in my ear.

"Goodbye, children," and Mister D was gone in a flash of light. He didn't even nod at his own childrens' table, something not lost on them or the rest of us.

The cheering and applause was deafening. Someone even broke out in "Ding, Dong, the Wicked Witch is Dead."

There was another flash of light and three stood where one had been a moment before. Zeus was in his pinstriped suit, my dad Poseidon in his Hawaiian shirt and beach shorts, and Hades in a gloomy burial robe as grey as the being wearing it. Around the food court other beings flashed into view, and in a moment it seemed the entire population of Olympus

had surrounded the campers. Some of the campers knelt or bowed to their parent and then to Zeus, but since the war my dad has only ever required a smile and a wave. And after waving to him I did at least bow to Zeus and then to Hera, both of whom nodded regally in acknowledgment.

Zeus cleared his throat and the food court became silent. "It is time to install a new camp director." Before I knew it, a pillar of light was shining down on me from somewhere – like a huge sunbeam or something, and all the campers and satyrs and nymphs were cheering and Lula was screaming in my ear and hugging my neck as soon as she realized what that shaft of light meant.

Talk about being left speechless! I barely managed to come to my feet as Chiron beckoned for me to join him and stand next to my dad.

"I'm going to need a *lot* of help," I whispered to the centaur as the campers continued to cheer.

"Yes you are, you little father-figure," was Chiron's reply. "Not even a quarter-century old and a hundred little sons and daughters to lead, guide, and be an example for." He actually smiled as he concluded: "I'll keep my schedule open."

"Did we choose well?" Poseidon asked Chiron proudly.

"Yes, Brother; I think you did." Chiron, you see, is also a son of Kronos. Okay, the wedding.

It was held in that chapel Annabeth designed and was finished just in time for the wedding; there's even a plaque in the foyer stating that the architect was the first one married in the building. It couldn't be held at Camp Half-Blood because our families wouldn't have been able to attend, but the chapel was right here on Long Island; only a few miles from camp - so it was convenient for the whole camp to come to the wedding.

I flew in on white, feathery wings, dressed in a short white Greek tunic – the off-one-shoulder type that shows half a muscular, hairy chest, ties at the waist, and shows off the legs really well. Oh, and white leather sandals that tie all the way up to the knees.

Why white? Annabeth and I both have some old-fashioned ideas, and by all formal tradition we'd *both* earned the right to 'wear white' (thank you, Hera), and so we did, and we did it proudly.

Mom and Poseidon, dressed in his white shirt and sea-green Polynesian lava-lava, met me at the door of the chapel and followed me up the aisle, my wings still intact - Annabeth said it would make for a fairy-tale wedding if the groom had *real* wings; something about

strength and virility. Not to mention somehow highly-romantic. Mom and Poseidon took their place in a pew next to my step-dad Paul as I stood at the altar to wait for the bride, and Mom took Paul's hand and squeezed it and then she did the same with Poseidon's hand.

Annabeth's mom Athena had asked for the privilege of designing the wedding dress as a gift *and* as a surprise for the bride, and Annabeth had agreed, touched at the offer made from a mostly-absent parent. She flew to the chapel riding sidesaddle on a pure white pegasus, her mom and her father Doctor Chase waiting for her at the door. Athena adjusted the dress (miles of flowing silk and lace) after Annabeth was lifted from the pegasus' back by Chiron (in a white tie tux shirt and coat), Flora presented the Bride with her bouquet of flowers (she'd given me a wreath of sea plants to wear), and then her father (also white tie tux'ed) took her arm and proudly brought her up the aisle, Athena walking behind them while Lula as Flower Girl spread delicate pink pedals all the way up the aisle ahead of them. As Athena took her seat, Doctor Chase placed Annabeth's hand in mine and squeezed the hands together and smiled.

Did I tell you? Lula told me that since we *both* deserved to 'wear white' she had every intention of honoring both. So, she spread blue petals ahead of me as I came up the aisle and then ran down a side aisle so she could spread pink ones for Annabeth to join me.

The minister was Rachel Elizabeth Dare's uncle, and he had the same ability as his niece of seeing through the Mist that hides much of the mythic world from the eyes of mortals; he says this 'vision' is what drove him to be a minister. So the fact that a pantheon of gods, centaurs, satyrs, and one mid-sized cyclops as Best Man filled the chapel for the wedding didn't even phase the man. I think he was grateful, however, that we hadn't invited any monsters.

I don't remember much of the wedding, but I remember feeling like the luckiest man in the world and how breathtakingly beautiful Annabeth looked in her miles of silk and lace. I remember being proud to say 'I do'. And when the minister said I could kiss the bride my big white wings surrounded and embraced us, making that most joyful kiss between us a private thing. But I could still hear Poseidon's deep, hearty laugh rumbling through the chapel like a high-tide surf.

I also remember that the reception was held in the Fellowship Hall of the chapel, and several more gods and goddesses touched my aegis that night. Mister D – I mean *Dionysus* – was even there to serve drinks, and he had three tables set up and labeled 'Gods', 'Mortals', and 'Brats'; the latter obviously referring to the Camp Half-Blood campers. I went over

to say something polite to him, and as I did he put up a hand to stop me. "When I see the looks of love between you two, I *know* you don't need any of *this* to make your night all it should be!"

"I just wanted to tell you thank you," I mumbled, embarrassed. "For supplying the drinks."

"That's what I do, Boy; that's what I do."

At the end of the evening the entire crowd came out to the lawn to cheer and wave as my bride found her way into my arms and we flew happily off into the sunset.

Okay; the sunset was in the west and we were flying east - back to Camp Half-Blood, where the Great House was now our home until our very own cabin could be built.

But, as we entered the Great House, Annabeth still in my arms, we met an unusual sight. Hesta was sitting calmly in a rocking chair on a hearth of a fireplace that had not been there before, a pot of something good-smelling simmering over the fire. She smiled and stood.

"Just wanted to give you my gift in private," she explained quietly, "And then I'll be gone."

She came over and kissed us both. "Now, I want you both to go to the hearth and take your proper places."

We looked - on one side of the hearth was an almost throne-like chair, while at the other a spear. Without thinking, Annabeth settled in the chair while I took the spear in hand and stood proud and defensive by my bride's side.

"Both roles complement each other and certainly do *not* deminish the person in that role," Hesta explained. "Never confuse that little truth."

Hesta turned to me. "Remember that you once told me... "

I was smiling. "That Hope survives best at the Hearth."

Hesta smiled. "And in the queen of his Hearth is a man's hope fulfilled or destroyed."

She then turned to Annabeth. "As I have also said, 'To claim your place at the Hearth' - at the heart of the home *and* the husband - 'you must let go of your distractions.' It is the only way you - and he - will survive." Annabeth nodded. "No matter how many times you rebuilt Olympus or create beautiful new camp cabins or all those other lovely buildings," and Annabeth smiled at the complement, "Or slay dragons on quests, your *first* and *formost* role is fulfilled here at the Hearth you share with your husband." She motioned at me with her eyes as she continued. "*His* Hope is in what he finds at the Hearth you tend."

Annabeth took my hand as she nodded.

"And you!" she said, smiling at me as she touched the spear in my hand, "No matter how many times you save the world *and* Olympus, your *first* and *foremost* role is to protect your Hearth and its Queen." She touched my Bride's hand. "*Her* Hope is in what you bring to the Hearth you now protect."

I leaned down and kissed the cheek of the Queen of my Hearth.

"Remember that the greatest Heros are those who faithfully and willingly tend to their *repsective* and *respected* duties at the Hearth."

We both nodded.

Hesta smiled. "And now I will say - Good Night."

Nightmare? Or Not?

(Percy is about 26 years old)

A blood-curling scream brought me out of a *very* deep sleep and pulled me right out of bed. By the gods, I never, *ever* want to hear a scream like that again!

But let me catch you up on things first.

Annabeth and I have been married for one and a half wonderful years. Sure there's been bumps in the road, but we help each other through them.

Annabeth and I were married barely a week when our new cabin was completed; right next to the Great House at Camp Half-Blood. Designed by Annabeth, it has a full basement for her architectural work, and since it's built on a slope she still has a beautiful view of the valley. The top floor is a bedroom and what we call the Hearth Room – a multi-purpose room with a hearth big enough that a cradle could fit on it with plenty of room. Which was a good thing, because within the year we needed room for two cradles. Yep – twins. A little boy and a little girl. Vincent and Katherine. And with the cradles on the Hearth, you *know* Hestia was there to help!

Nothing makes a boy feel like a man like being a father! It was the beginning of a whole new life. Even my work as Camp Director paled to taking care of a wife and children. Sure there's hard times, but the joy is overwhelming. And as soon as we got to the point that the babies were sleeping all night... *that* was heaven.

Anyway, the scream: Annabeth heard nosies and had gotten up to check on the babies. And that's when the screaming began. This wasn't a '*eww a flesh-eating bug*' scream; this was a life and death scream; a 'tear a parent's heart out and stomp on it' scream. I was out of bed and in the hearth room faster than I've ever moved in my life! And there was Annabeth hysterical, the goddess Hestia unconscious on the hearth, and two empty cradles.

Okay; they weren't *both* empty; one had a parchment note in it, which I grabbed to read just as the front door flew open and Chiron and Grover (a centaur and a satyr, respectfully) rushed in.

"Heard the screaming all the way down at the forest," Grover began as I shoved the parchment at Chiron, who read it quickly, his face darkening as he finished it.

"Grover, take care of my wife," I growled as I pushed my way through my two friends and stepped out onto the porch, mumbling "*fly!*" as I lept – two huge, white wings instantly forming and lifting me into the sky.

Okay, if I was trying to be a good husband I would have stayed behind and held my wife's hand, but I was also trying to be a good father and there was very little time to act on the note. One has to make a choice and it was the correct choice at that moment.

In less than an hour I'd flown from the camp – out on the north shore of Long Island – to what would be the 600th floor of the Empire State Building – you know, where Olympus is currently hovering and meddling with human affairs.

The Great Council Room of Olympus doesn't exactly have a "Ring for Service" bell, but it's rare enough that a demigod flies in and demands a council meeting in the middle of the night that I *did* attract attention. The fact that I sleep in my nothings and hadn't dressed before leaving for Olympus *also* attracted attention – Hermes kindly handed me a mortal-sized bathrobe as I touched down on the floor of the council room, for which I was grateful, wrapping it around my waist and tying it as I didn't plan on being there long enough to dissipate the wings and then regrow them to leave.

I bowed curtly at my father, who was wrapped in a big beach towel as if he too slept in his nothings, and then at Zeus and Hera, both in more-formal nightwear.

"What is the meaning... " the great Zeus began, but I cut in.

"WHERE ARE MY CHILDREN?!" I demanded.

"Watch your voice... "

"WHERE ARE MY CHILDREN?!" I demanded again, not even heeding Zeus as I held the parchment out.

Hera held out a hand and the parchment flew into it, enlarging itself so it could be read by a forty-foot tall goddess, which she read aloud:

"Renounce your demigod status and Poseidon as your father and your children will be returned."

Athena dissipated immediately – she's Annabeth's mother, so it wasn't *too* hard to figure out where she was headed.

"A choice, Mortal," Hera commented as she passed the parchment to Zeus as if it were of little consequence. "Kinder and gentler than what's been done to other bast... " She didn't finish that word but chose another... "done to other *children* outside their parents' marriage." She should know - she's tortured more of her husband's children than the rest of the goddesses combined. Just ask Hercules.

"The *choice*," I retorted, "is whether one of you are going to return my children to me or if I have to pillage Olympus to find them!"

"You wouldn't dare," Hera hissed.

"Dare me!" I exclaimed while definitely not telling them about features Annabeth had designed into the new, improved Olympus that would make travel from one palace to another a very easy thing.

"Would you lose your tongue, Child?" challenged Zeus.

"A responsible father," Artemis said dryly, interrupting the fight brewing between her father and me; "How utterly refreshing." Several of the gods glared at her as she stood and smiled. "We could learn from him." She then turned to me. "My huntresses will join you, Percy Jackson." With that, she dissipated the same way Athena had and with the same destination in mind – I hoped.

"Where is Hestia?" one of the gods behind me asked; I didn't see who.

"She's unconscious on my hearth!" I shouted. "The goddess of the Hearth was attacked and overwhelmed - at a Hearth!" I paused. "Who could have done that but someone in this room?!"

"ENOUGH!" Zeus shouted. "Watch your place, Mortal!"

"My place is in the recovery of my children! Do you *challenge* that?"

Zeus lifted an angry hand, but before he could do anything Poseidon reached out and scooped me up and dissipated from the room.

The entire camp was gathered around our cabin by the time Poseidon appeared there, me struggling to get out of his huge, tight fist. Artemis stood to one side of the house, issuing instructions to her huntresses, and Athena stood in the doorway, motioning us to the house.

"That was very foolish of you, Child!" my mother-in-law said gently as I entered the house and took my wife in my arms.

"Sorry if I didn't just roll over and accept fate!"

Athena took several breaths before speaking again, allowing me my anger. She was a wise mother-in-law for that – being the goddess of wisdom and all. In fact, instead of yelling back at me, she reached out and pressed my aegis against my chest – the part of it that bore her symbol and hence I could call on her wisdom any time I needed. She then waited for some calm, rational thinking to feed its way through my anger. The only reply I gave her was that guy smile that says 'thank you' without saying it. She nodded in reply, able to translate.

"Now, *Son*," she began, and she only called me that when she needed me calm and thinking. "Instead of swooping in and accusing twelve of the most powerful beings in existence of this crime, how about we think of who would have been motivated to do this?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Annabeth snorted. I didn't say anything because it wasn't all that obvious to me. But Annabeth caught the look. "Percy – what do the wives of philandering gods do?"

I looked at Poseidon, who looked down, blushing.

"Lady Artemis!" I called. The Huntress goddess entered the house, followed by former camper and currently Artemis' lieutenant Thalia, who was dressed in a one-piece bathing suit that had pockets for weapons - as if she was already expecting a swim to Poseidon's undersea palace. "Right," I muttered under my breath as I turned to my father. "Are you with me?"

"Son; you know we can't interfere... "

"That's so lame! A god can kidnap my children but the gods can't help get them back? Is that what I'm hearing?"

"I'm sorry... "

"I don't want to hear it!"

Again Athena spoke: "Percy, you *know*... "

"I know that my children are kidnapped by family and family is refusing to lift their godly little fingers to help!" I was really, really angry! "Can you at least hold your daughter while I do something?"

Athena nodded patiently, taking Annabeth from me as I marched out the door, someone handing me a pair of shorts and an orange CAMP HALF-BLOOD shirt to don so the campers wouldn't know more about me than they should – the bathrobe tied at the waist just wasn't holding up to all my moving about.

"Campers to the Food Court!" I shouted as I marched there myself. "And any so-called gods who aren't helping can clear out *now*!" I didn't look behind me but I'm pretty sure that's when my father left.

By the time I made it to the food court the entire camp was running in my wake, including Grover and the rest of the satyr and most of the forest spirits. And even the pegasi, although Blackjack was not to be seen. I came to a stop in front of the huge metal cauldron in the center of the court - the basin in which campers offered food to the gods before eating themselves - and looked around at all the tired, confused faces.

"My babies have been kidnapped by one of the gods," I announced.

"Or goddesses," Athena added, having followed behind me, my wife under her arm.

"They're good at that, aren't they?" Someone shouted; "Is it our fault one of our parents... ?"

Fire came into Athena's eyes. "Not all of us, Perseus Jackson." She turned to the crowd of campers. "Not all of us." Artemis nodded her agreement.

I took as many breaths as Athena usually takes before speaking carefully to me, and then I went down on one knee and bowed my head. "My apology, My Ladies."

Athena leaned down and kissed my head. "You have every right to be angry. Let's just direct all that energy where it will do the best good."

I nodded, thankful that I had a forgiving mother-in-law. I then turned to continue addressing the campers.

"I've been to Olympus and they're refusing help; their usual act of not being able to interfere in mortal affairs." I paused. "Again, my apologies," I added towards Athena and Artemis, who both nodded back. "Even my father..." I let the sentence remain unfinished, mostly because emotion was starting to choke my throat. "Lady Hera says this is a far *kinder* act than what most of the jilted wives on Olympus do..."

"She'd know!" someone shouted from the back of the crowd, seconding my own opinion.

After more exclamations and a great amount of murmuring died down, I lifted a hand toward the stream that ran close to the food court and made a grabbing and jerking motion. A geyser shot out of the stream and landed right where I directed it with an angry fist – and the cauldron flame was extinguished for the first time in three thousand years.

"There will be no more offerings; not until they prove themselves worthy of our respect."

A threatening rumble of thunder rolled across the sky, shaking the columns ringing the food court.

I felt a soft but firm hand on my shoulder; it was Athena's hand. "You tread *dangerous* ground, Perseus."

I turned to face her. "They're my children; it's what mortals do. Whoever took my children is treading *dangerous* ground."

At these words, a shout rose among the campers; fists in the air.

I looked up, reasonably sure Zeus was listening, and shouted: "You call yourselves gods, but you sit idle and watch with bored expressions while hiding behind your laws and traditions as your excuse for inaction!" In anger I kicked the cauldron. "You don't deserve our respect until you act like human life is as sacred as you think *you* are!"

After a few more rumbles of thunder, Athena spoke. "I too am bound by our ancient law, Son; the most I can do is wait here with Annabeth..."

"I'm not being left behind!" shouted Annabeth, pulling herself out of her mother's arms; nearly every girl in the camp cheering. "What makes you think...?"

"What if they're returned while I'm gone?" I asked Annabeth softly. "Who'll be here?"

"I will," Athena replied.

"As will I," Artemis said; "Thalia will lead the hunt as I am also bound."

"And me," a gruff, macho voice shouted from outside the court. I turned to see Ares, the most annoying god of all stagger into view. God of war, he and I have had more run-ins than I care to remember, and none of them would convince me I'd want him anywhere near my children.

"I like your attitude, Percy. No one's talked to that blowfish Zeus like that for centuries." He grinned. "Clarrise must be rubbing off on you."

Ares reached out and touched my aegis and added his symbol to those already there; it glowing blood-red. "Strictly on loan. I can't help you *directly*; you know that. But if you're going to start a war against a goddess you'll need it."

"A kind action from the god of war?" Athena suppressed a smile. "Olympus must be crumbling."

"If I can't be there in person I'll at least be there in spirit." He looked at me with a grin. "Right?"

"If needed," was my curt reply, and from Annabeth's look I'm reasonably sure the flames of war were showing in my eyes. "Thank you, My Lord."

"A 'thank you' from little Perseus? This *is* a strange day."

"But as far as watching over my children..."

Ares placed the palm of his hand square on my breastbone. "By the river Styx I swear I will protect and defend your children if they are returned to this camp in your absence."

He was *serious*; swearing by the river Styx is an unbreakable vow for the gods. I placed my hand on his and did that manly hand squeeze thing and we nodded that guy-nod-thing and understood everything that wasn't said aloud.

"I'll be here as well," a weak voice said as Chiron supported Hestia into the food court.

"Nana Hestia!" I said as I went to her. "Are you alright?"

"I will be."

"Who...?" Annabeth began.

"Who do you think? Amphitrite." The campers mumbled angrily. "She's been plotting against you ever since she decided Poseidon loved you more than her son Triton."

"Loved me more?" I asked, remembering full well that my father told me on one of my birthdays that I was his favorite child – but I wasn't going to say *that* out loud!

"Didn't you notice he was wrapped in a beach towel at the meeting?" Ares asked, smirking.

"Yeah? So?"

"Amphitrite kicked him out of his own palace... "

"*Their* own palace," corrected Athena.

Ares continued as if he didn't hear her: "... a couple of days ago because he wouldn't swear to always love Triton more than his demigod kids. Snotty-nosed little Triton stood by Mommy like the little brat he is."

I turned to face the dark of the forest. "Father?" I whispered.

"But the real reason she kicked him out," Ares continued, "was so she could pull this little kidnapping off. She knew he'd stop her."

"I'm sorry, Perseus," Athena whispered as she put an arm around my shoulder. "He *does* love you, but he's bound by law... " I began to say something but she shushed me. "Deep breath, Boy; deep breath."

"If I do that I'll have to think and then I'll cry."

"Then cry." And she took me in her arms and I did cry, and the food court was silent as Athena and Annabeth held me.

When I finally turned to face the food court again, having wiped my face, I saw all the campers were gone. "Where's everyone gone?"

"Where do you think, dummy?" Grover snorted. "They're arming themselves for war."

"This isn't their battle... "

"This camp is a *family*, Percy," Chiron spoke. "These children are *your* children; many of them have more loyalty to *you* than to their birth families. This *is* their battle."

It's not often I'm left speechless, but this was one of those times. I hugged my wife tight as campers begin filing back into the court, dressed in full armor and ready for a war I knew they couldn't join – it was going to be undersea!

"And it's our battle, too!"

I turned to see that Blackjack had landed just outside the food court, Mom and my step-dad climbing down off his back.

"Mom? Paul? How...?"

"I lowered the magic that keeps mortals out," Athena explained. "They *are* the babies' grandparents."

"It's not often a Pegasus lands on your fire escape landing," Paul explained. "We figured it was from you and was important, so we climbed on and here we are."

"Lady Artemis," my mother nodded respectfully; "Can you make me one of your huntresses just for tonight?"

"What skills do you...?"

"I'm a very angry mother because someone has hurt my child and kidnapped my grandbabies."

Artemis layed her hand on my mother. "For tonight." She turned her head and nodded at another goddess. "Hebe," she said simply to the youthful-looking goddess standing beside her. The Goddess of Youth then layed a hand to my mother's cheek and took twenty years off her. Just like that.

"Wow!" step-dad Paul exclaimed, "Hot." He turned to Artemis and bowed "What about me joining up? I'm *going* to fight..." Paul demanded.

"I only accept women," Artemis began.

"I accept *anyone* who can fight," and Ares was laying a big, broad hand on Paul's shoulder, and as he did you could almost see angry power being pumped into him. "Let's go check out some of the weapons on my chopper, Dude."

Paul and Ares went to check out weapons.

"Mom..." I began.

"Don't you 'Mom' me." New younger face; same old Mom.

"I was *going* to say 'thank you'."

The ground rumbled and the food court's marble floor split open as it disgorged three figures.

"Daddy!" Annabeth shouted as she threw herself into her father's arms, her stepmother standing patiently by, brushing off the dirt she'd collected while traveling through the earth all the way from Seattle.

"Nico!" I exclaimed, shaking the hand of the son of Hades.

"Are we late?" Nico asked with a hellish grin.

"Who...?"

"I sent him for them as well," Athena explained.

"And I sent someone to watch their children," added Artemis.

"So Ares is here?" Nico asked; "Bring some good stuff?"

"He and Paul are at the chopper checking things out."

"Let's go, then." Nico and Dr. Chase headed over to the chopper – and got there just as Ares was explaining to Paul: "I can't help *direct* - you know that; you aren't a stupid man. I can't offer any of this to you." Paul opened his mouth but the god of war continued, whispering loudly. "You gotta lift it off the chopper after I turn my back." Paul and Dr. Chase nodded, smiling.

Ares then dissipated up to the Great House after touching Dr. Chase as he did Paul, and then Mom, Paul, and Dr. Chase pillaged the chopper of every weapon they could carry and thought they could use. Meanwhile, Mrs. Chase had introduced herself to Hestia, and they were agreeing that they would stand watch at the Great House and watch over campers who felt threatened through the night.

"Perseus," Athena called me towards Ares' chopper. "What would you call this weapon the grandparents seem to have left behind?"

"A cannon," I said, touching it, and it fell to the ground. "Ooo; a loose cannon. And wide-mouthed."

"And the wise ones left the loose cannon with the big mouth behind so they could fight an *intelligent* battle?" The goddess of wisdom was almost smiling, and I took the hint.

"Right. I *did* shoot off my mouth."

"Yes; you did. And if you're going to survive the actual battle?"

"A change of weapons?"

The goddess of wisdom kissed me.

The offerings cauldron was still steaming, casting more than one rainbow in the torchlight of the early morning, so I threw a coin through one and requested to be connected to my brother Tyson. When he finally appeared in the mist I could see the Great House in the background.

"Already here, brother," Tyson said, smiling, his single eye gleaming as if tonight was going to be a grand adventure. Within moments he was at the food court and explaining that the cyclops who work Poseidon's forges were already mobilizing to support us when we arrive.

"Percy," Thalia interrupted my greeting of Tyson, "I've recently had it put in my mind," and all three or four goddesses standing around us shook their heads innocently, "I've recently *'thought of'*, all on my own, places Amphitrite may have taken the children. I suggest we split into two armies. You and the cyclops... "

"And us," Paul and Dr. Chase said at the same time, cocking back the firing hammer on some really, really big guns.

"The men," Thalia began again, nodding at the two grandfathers, "will lead an army to Poseidon's palace; a good place for you to begin and to work off some of that male energy." From Thalia this wasn't an insult. "I will lead the women in storming a few of Amphitrite's more secret places." She paused. "Where we will exercise our female aggression." And at that the Huntresses' bathing suits all morph'ed back into their regular hunting dresses.

Calypso's island came immediately to my mind as a possible hiding place, as did that island where the two remaining Harpy Sisters (that's what I call them) live.

"We will also stop by the Grey Sisters (those three old crones who share one eye) and discover what they've seen and will let you know."

"Would the oracle...?" began Annabeth, but she was interrupted by Chiron's cellphone going off – he had a special ringtone for when it was Rachel Elizabeth Dare, the current Oracle, calling in from the finishing school in Connecticut where she teaches, and it was that very ringtone that was buzzing – screaming, actually; it was a ringtone of a banshee screaming. Whatever. Although she can't remember a thing she says in prophecy, she's got a custom-made auto-record MP3 player that starts recording whenever she goes into prophecy mode, which then autodial's Chiron.

Chiron listened intently to the recorded message, nodded, and hung up.

"Almost *too* simple: Vincent is being held at the undersea palace, guarded only by Triton; Katherine is in Amphitrite's palace on Olympus."

"I've got the plans in the basement," Annabeth began; "I figured she'd be giving us trouble eventually, so the redesign I did of her palace has some features she hasn't discovered yet."

"How do you know?" Thalia asked.

"There are some things a demigod step-daughter-in-law in a greek god family keeps track of." She paused. "Especially when she loves her husband."

That earned her another kiss.

"Ladies to the house, then," Athena announced, impressed, and the female army ran off accordingly. *That* was going to be one heck of a fight!

I turned to the campers.

"I'm sorry. I appreciate your willingness more than you will *ever* know – I do! But this is going to be more of a raid than a battle. And too many bodies make a raid fail."

You can imagine the level of objections, which I found very gratifying.

"Ares," I asked; he'd come back to the food court when he figured the grandparents were done pillaging his chopper; "Can you give them something to do that makes them feel like they're helping?"

"It'll cost you."

"I'll help you skip the next four-hour report Annabeth gives the Council."

"You got it!" Ares smiled. "All right, campers! Form up! Percy has left us to protect the camp as well as the children when they're returned! *Are we going to fail?!"* Imagine the god of war as a boot camp instructor and you get the picture.

I motioned Paul, Dr. Chase, Nico, and Tyson to follow me down to the beach as the god of war began giving teenage (and younger!) campers their marching orders. But only Tyson and Nico were following me; the other two were still standing by Ares.

"Lord Ares," Dr. Chase began, "The kid's not really dressed for war."

"Neither are you," retorted the god of war. "Unlike you two wimps, though, the kid's been for a swim in the River Styx."

"Styx?" Paul asked.

"The river Achilles got dipped in," Dr. Chase explained.

"Yeah," said Ares, "But Kid here did it without Mommy holding his ankles."

Both mens' eyebrows lifted appreciatively. "That's true," step-dad Paul finally said; "I'd have heard."

"Meanwhile, you guys," Ares waved a hand and the two grandfathers were now clad in blue-cammo armor.

"Kevlar codpieces?" Paul asked, looking down.

"*Celestial bronze* codpieces," Ares corrected. "Gods can fight down and dirty."

By the time Paul and Dr. Chase had joined us at the beach, five hippocamps – horse front ends with long fish bodies and tails – had trumpeted their greetings and were all too eager to take us where we needed to go. Oh, and there was a mermaid – Tyson and I could breath underwater, but Nico and the two grandfathers had to be kissed by a mermaid before they could do so. Kiss completed, we mounted the hippocamps and off we went.

Okay, here's what the women were doing while the men were enjoying their first mermaid kiss: Annabeth fired up her computerized

drafting table and displayed all the plans for Amphitrite's palace in Olympus, pointing out the secret entrance.

"Are there secret entrances to *our* renovated palaces?" Athena inquired, Artemis and Hestia watching intently for the answer.

"Does there need to be?" Annabeth asked back.

Athena decided to save *that* discussion for another time as Annabeth removed a picture of the church we were married in (which she had designed) from the wall on the hill side of the cabin basement and pushed on an odd-colored brick. The wall slid open and she smiled. "Let's go!"

"Go where?" Thalia asked.

"Olympus. This is part of the Olympic renovations."

Athena, Artemis, and Hestia all smiled, appreciating my wife's foresight.

Mortals entering Olympus is a dangerous thing, even if they're invited. And to try it in what was quickly becoming broad daylight was suicidal. Therefore Annabeth's tunnel system didn't come out anywhere a mortal could be seen – it connected with an entire series of tunnels linking all the major palaces for which she'd overseen the remodeling after the battle against Kronos. She and Mom and Artemis' huntresses simply took all the right tunnels until they ended up in front of a panel bearing Amphitrite's symbol.

The hippocamps got us men to Poseidon's palace quicker than I thought possible, dropping us in the midst of the cyclops forgers who had turned their hammers on the great wall between their forges and the palace and had broken through and were marching on the palace itself.

"Father was wrong to not help you," a cyclops I'd never met said in his innocent, childlike voice, looking down at me from some thirty feet higher than my head. "We must tell him."

"How many sea creatures are going to be swimming the corridors of this place?" Dr. Chase asked – he's a war historian and tactics is one his hobbies.

"You're right!" I nodded. Facing the palace, I closed my eyes and slowly waved both arms as if surrounding the palace with something – a huge air bubble to be exact. Anything that had to swim to move was now beached. Including Triton ...

... who we found trussed up and hanging from a hook at the entrance of the palace, flopping about on his two fish-like appendages he has instead of legs; unable to stand.

"You!" my stepbrother hissed;" Take your brat and leave us!"

"I will if you tell me where he's at." No need to get into a fight with him.

"Can't you hear?!"

Nico kicked Triton as the rest of us stepped over him.

Meanwhile, below ground at Olympus, Annabeth and her band silently poured through the hidden door into a storage room in Amphitrite's palace.

"Something's wrong," one of the huntresses whispered.

"What do you mean?" my mom whispered back.

"Look – the servants are all asleep." In fact, something had put all the beings in the palace to sleep, literally in the middle of what they'd been doing when sleep came upon them.

"Gas?" Mom asked.

"This is Olympus," Annabeth began; "Probably what happened was ... "

"... that Night came early," whispered an Old Man in a wrinkled nightshirt and long white beard standing in the shadows. "But don't worry; it's daytime for you ladies."

"Non-interference, huh?" Mom asked sarcastically.

"What are you talking about? I lent Amphitrite several barrels of my favorite apples and she's never paid me back. I'm here trying to get back what's mine, and they," and he pointed at the sleeping servants, "they tried to stop me."

"And you're sticking to that story?"

"Aye, Missy; I am."

"Thank you," and Mom touched his shoulder.

Annabeth obviously knew the layout of the palace and led her band up through the cellars and to the main floor, every single woman doubling in speed as the familiar wail of our unfed daughter assailed their hears. As Annabeth gathered the baby up her mother Athena appeared, threw a wrap around the women, and dissipated from the palace, all the women dissipating with her.

What Annabeth didn't notice before dissipating was that Thalia, Artemis' first-in-command, gently layed a bundle of her own in the baby's place and pulled the blanket up over it. For the record, it was a skunk.

"Non-interference?" Mom asked Athena as the two of them followed Annabeth into the bedroom of our cabin to change and feed the screaming child.

“Once she'd lifted the baby into her arms, there was nothing in which to interfere.”

We men stepped through the great doors of Poseidon's palace – doors large enough for whales to swim through to show respect to the sea god, and I heard the familiar wail that had robbed me of so many nights of sleep. Today, however, it was music to my ears and even brought tears to my eyes as I ran up a grand staircase and headed down a hallway strewn with various shark and fish who had probably been on patrol before the air bubble. I had pulled my pen from my shirt pocket and uncapped it, the sword Riptide instantly shooting up to full size and gleaming in the relative light of the corridor.

“Traps, Percy!” Paul shouted.

“They all seem to be sprung,” Dr. Chase added as I came to a stop. “Look there... and there... someone's sprung them.”

I slowed my speed down considerably as the grandfathers helped watch for further traps, but every one we saw was already sprung.

We ran down a final corridor, the banshee-like wail of my little boy getting louder and louder - and then softer. We backtracked to where it was the loudest, and Tyson laid a huge hand on the wall, gently feeling vibrations. When he found just the right spot his eye gleamed and he smiled and lifted a huge forge hammer. I pulled the two grandfathers back as Tyson hammered the wall several times before it gave, and then it was a race to see who would be through the wall first – I won, Riptide ahead of me, slicing its way right through Poseidon's head, where he sat holding my baby and making noises and sounds to calm him down. My father turned his head, a motion that jerked Riptide's handle out of my hand, and he smiled at me. And at Paul and Dr. Chase, who had very big guns pointed at him, at Nico with his death-black sword and knife, and at Tyson, who had his hammer lifted and ready to strike.

“I didn't even know about this secret room until today,” Poseidon said casually, going back to making baby sounds at my son. “I've no idea when she created this little hideout.”

“Umm,” was pretty much the only thing I could find to say.

“Could you please pull that thing out of my head?”

I did so, and he shook his head as it immediately healed.

“You can't kill us gods, Percy; not even with Riptide. We can't be destroyed. You should've figured this out by now, but we're simply the forces of Nature – of the natural world and the natural mind; the primal

forces that never go away. These things will always be with Mankind, no matter how civilized Mortals think they've become."

He stood up and faced me. "The real test, Son," he continued as he gently handed my screaming son to me, "The real test is how you deal with us." He smiled. "Or, how you learn to work us to your advantage." He lifted his eyebrows in a way that meant 'did you understand that?'

"As in," Paul began, "learn to control you?"

"Control us? Never!" But we could all see the smile being suppressed.

Before anyone else could say anything, a light flashed and Hestia, greatly recovered, was standing in front of me trying to take my son from me.

"Six hours past feeding time, Dear, and with poor Annabeth nursing them... *so* swollen..."

I released my son and Hestia dissipated back to our cabin to help relieve my poor wife.

"Control you?" I was really confused.

"All the world's a stage."

"What does Shakespeare have to do...?"

"Lord Poseidon," Paul interrupted; "May I explain this to him as we leave you to your home repairs?"

Poseidon motioned a 'go ahead', and we turned to leave.

"Percy," Paul began as we retraced our steps through the palace and to where the hippocamps were waiting just outside the bubble, "Do you obey every single rule? Every one?"

"Well..."

"No one does. But they become experts at *appearing* to do so."

"I don't know about that."

"When was the last time our country had a Congress that followed the Constitution?"

"That's a trick question."

"And yet they appear to be doing so in all their innocent glory."

"What's this all got to do with..."

"With the gods and their non-interference?" Dr. Chase spoke up. "Percy, who do you think tied Triton up?" and we were stepping over him as he asked. "Who cleared this place of booby traps?"

Nico kicked Triton again as we stepped over him, leaving the palace.

"Poseidon did, I guess."

"Who was holding the baby and protecting him?"

"My dad..."

"He put on a *marvelous* non-interference act, back at camp, don't you think? But here in his palace he didn't have to – the gods don't peer into each others' homes."

"That's hypocritical!"

"Like that note you wrote excusing yourself from gym class December of your senior year?"

"I can explain!"

"No need; your mom's tried. The thing is, Son, we all have rules we totally disagree with but don't feel we have the power to change. So we become world-class actors to appear as if we obey them while finding every way around them we can.

"Every single god who came to camp last night was doing everything they could to help you and still appear to be neutral. I dare say when you hear your wife's story you'll hear a few more such stories."

"So what's keeping them from changing these laws?"

Paul and Dr. Chase answered at the same time: "Zeus."

"And to act as if you're working within *his* rules while changing them behind his back – *that* would be a world-class act."

The entire camp was at the beach as the hippocamps brought us in, cheering their hearts out. Nico and I just smiled and waved, but Paul and Dr. Chase soaked it in as if they'd never been thanked for anything in their life. Ares pushed his way through the campers, a broad smile on his face as he layed an arm on each of the men and took back whatever powers he'd loaned them. He reached for my aegis, and I held it out to him, assuming he was going to take his symbol back. But he stopped and smiled even wider.

"One thing, first, Boy."

"What's that?"

"Indulge me." He pulled a monstrously huge sword from his back. "I've always wanted to know how a sparing session with you would go if you have some of my powers behind you. Ten minutes?"

"You're on!" and Riptide was out and shining in the mid-day sun.

Annabeth and the goddesses were attracted to the beach by the thunderous sounds of battle. But they arrived just as the ten-minute gong Tyson was holding went off and weapons were recapped. My wife broke through the crowd just as Ares put a strong arm around me in what even the girls could tell was a friendly choke hold and we were both laughing like macho guys burning off testosterone.

"What's happening?" she asked her father.

"Olympic-level male bonding." And he was grinning really big.

After a moment my wife realized that she'd not figure this one out, so she ran out to hug and kiss me – and kissed Ares as well, and the poor god almost showed a tender side before he caught himself and got all macho as he collected his weapons back from Paul and Dr. Chase.

Three days later I stood before the Council of Olympus, all twelve thrones occupied and more chairs bought in for all the lesser gods. Amphitrite, smelling mysteriously like skunk, was looking *very* displeased that the chair her husband had supplied for her was a rickety wooden beach chair with neon-bright stripes that did *not* go well with what she was wearing.

"I speak to you today not only as Director of Camp Half-Blood, but as a Demigod, a Husband, and as a Father." I was standing near the center hearth of the council room, Hestia occupying her familiar seat there. Oh, not all the thrones were occupied; sorry. Poseidon and Athena were standing beside me in a show of support.

"I speak only after long meetings with the camp counselors and with individual campers. Chiron knows what I am going to say, but he has not given an opinion; nor have I asked his opinion because this is a matter for us demigods."

I cleared my throat. Now came the hard part.

"Speak on, Mortal," Zeus' voice boomed out.

"Those far wiser than me tell me I should play a diplomatic game with parties and dropped suggestions before actually... "

"Get on with it," Hera insisted. "This isn't going to be long, is it? Like that creature Annabelle's speeches?"

"Annabeth," corrected Athena.

"But I'm not much for politics or acting," I cut in while the two goddesses glared at each other. "So here goes:

"The campers of Camp Half-Blood will no longer refer to the occupants of Olympus as 'gods'."

That caused a commotion, you'd better believe!

"Explain yourself," Zeus said in a quiet but very angry whisper.

"When the first mortals were driven out of their original Paradise, it was because 'they have become like the gods, knowing good and evil.'"

I paused.

"By this definition, the occupants of Olympus *cannot* be gods."

Zeus raised a threatening hand but Poseidon spoke: "Hear him out, Brother."

"You are all '*Forces of Nature*'; whether it be in the natural world or in human nature. You don't *think* about your actions or their consequences. You only think of what would be pleasing or advantageous to yourself. You don't know Good from Evil - all you know is nature and its impulses and that you want those impulses fulfilled. Hence egos of an Olympic proportion."

Still no lightening bolts but a lot of angry looks. Except Hades; he was almost smiling.

"Lord Hades: Why do you employ mortals as judges of those entering the Underworld?"

"As you say, nephew," was his only reply.

"Knowing Good and Evil makes Mortals more godly than Olympians. Even when we don't act like it, we *do* know Right from Wrong. We *do* know Truth from Lies. Knowing them, we are free to make Choices. None of you here are free to make Choices, because you don't even know Right from Wrong. How sad it that? These Choices are what make us who we are and are what we will be judged by. They are what make us strive to be better."

Hades nodded as I took a breath.

"Truth is something that even Nature is forced to bow to and acknowledge. And I'm going to tell you a few truths today.

"You were considered 'gods' when Nature and Human Impulses ruled the mortal world. Hence all you had to do was identify yourself and demand to be worshiped. No effort, no teaching, and certainly no leading by example.

"The reason you lost followers – why mortals lost faith in you – was because of one single man. One man changed it all, and with that change your temples crumbled. He spent three short years serving and bettering others. He did what you haven't been able to do in three-*thousand* years - he earned the gratitude, affection, and loyalty of mortals through his selfless acts of kindness and love. He calmed storms, healed the sick, and taught a better way than mere human urges. And, he was gentle and humble enough to wash their sore and aching feet before dying so Justice and Mercy could be satisfied for our benefit.

"He's been worshiped ever since, while your natural, impulsive, self-indulgent lives have become the fodder of comedy in books, on the stage, and in movies."

I looked around at a lot of really angry faces.

"Take the hint."

Still no lightening bolts, but it was getting really, really dark outside the council room.

"But, for those of you who have no clue as to what I've talked about, here's something your impulsive, natural minds will understand." I pulled a small box with a small button out of a pocket. "Here's what's going to happen from now on when you mess with a demigod or their children." I looked square at Amphitrite as I pushed the button and there was a loud explosion as Amphitrite's palace fell into ruin. C-4 is a wonderful thing to build into the foundations of a building.

"Your architect regrets you felt the need to kidnap her children," I said very slowly to Poseidon's wife. "Perhaps when you have apologized adequately she may consider a new design. She regrets that her fee will be ... *steep*."

I was really, really afraid this was the point where Zeus would flame me with a lightening bolt, and I think he wanted to!

"Anything else, Mister Camp Director?" Zeus said, leaning closer and closer and looking really, really threatening.

My father pushed me forward with his foot.

"Yes. A few changes to the camp."

"You've dared mention one."

"Yes. And Number Two: We're not relighting the great cauldron. We're mounting smaller ones at the end of each table. As campers feel their parent is worth their respect, we will have a ceremony lighting that being's cauldron. From now on you've got to earn your bread, same as we."

I paused, my heart racing in near panic. I couldn't believe I had the courage to carry through with all of this. But as I remembered Annabeth's scream and the sight of two empty cradles, I found more courage.

"Three. We're going to modernize weapons training. We're still going to train with the classic weapons, but it's been three-thousand years! Can you imagine guns that shoot celestial bronze bullets and light-weight nylon vests lined with celestial bronze... ? One student is working on a cloth woven from celestial bronze fibers... "

Ares smiled broadly.

"Four: We're going to teach the campers a new definition to the word 'Hero'. One doesn't have to go on a quest to be a hero; that's a false measuring stick. A youth who saves the most precious part of themselves for marriage is a hero. A couple who are faithful to each other for a lifetime

are heroes. Someone who resists the natural world and aspires for greater things is a hero. Someone who overcomes ... "

"We get the picture, Peter Jackson!" exclaimed Dionysus, falling back on this torment of not saying my name right; "You don't have to make a movie for us to understand."

"Anything else?" Hera asked, disgust on her face.

"Yes. Why should the campers work to support the camp? We're going to start charging an annual enrollment fee for each camper, to be paid by their Olympic parent. This fee will also help pay for a school... "

"School?" half the Olympians gasped.

"The year-round students aren't getting the education they need to survive in today's world – they need at *least* their high school education. After that we could supply on-line college courses."

I paused. The room had gone silent again.

"One more thing. For now. One weekend a month will be Family Weekend – the campers' mortal families will be invited to come and visit and watch what we're doing and learning."

After a moment the King of the 'Gods' slowly rose from his throne. "I refuse!" shouted Zeus; "This is the most insolent... "

The sun chose just that moment to move just enough to shine through the windows at a different angle and sparkle off something sticking out the top of my shirt pocket.

"What is that?" Hera insisted, covering her eyes.

"It's a cell phone, Mother," Ares replied.

"A what?"

"A telephone. And I'm willing to bet my tattoos it's set on 'speaker'.

Zeus straightened up to his full forty-foot dignity. "Chiron?!"

Down on the planet, in the food court of Camp Half-Blood, the centaur instructor of thousands of years of heroes leaned over and gently pushed the 'speak' button on the conference phone that had been brought down to the court just for this meeting. "Yes, Brother?"

"Who is listening in on this *private* meeting?"

"The entire camp, Brother. I'm told by a few of the techno-geeks that it's also going out over the internet in something called 'streaming audio' and is being listened to by the campers' families." Chiron paused as he smiled at the campers. "So, Brother: Do you blast us all to Hades, or do you learn to become responsible parents?"

Zeus sat quietly for far too long. And then he sat there even longer. Finally he put both hands on the arms of his throne and rose.

"It appears, then, that we have a new master."

And with that, the King of Olympus slowly knelt on one knee bowed to me.

Chiron's cellphone (the one in my pocket) began screaming like a banshee. Or was that my son? Why was my son on Olympus? Where I am I, really?

The screaming continued until I was almost completely awake. I lept from bed in a complete panic that the babies were being kidnapped. But as I got to the hearth room all that was there was Annabeth and Hestia, holding the babies and performing the night feeding.

"They're alright?" I asked breathlessly.

"They're fine; why wouldn't they be?" Annabeth asked.

"Not kidnapped?"

"Kidnapped?" Annabeth paused. "Did you have pepperoni on your pizza last night? You *know* pepperoni gives you nightmares!"

As Annabeth was nursing little Katherine, Hestia stood and brought me little Vincent, who'd already been fed, so that I could see for myself that he was alright. She kissed me on the cheek and whispered in my ear:

"You know, child, you're going to *have* to get into the habit of wearing something to bed before your children get old enough to tell on you."

I looked down. She was right - time for a new habit.

I looked at Annabeth. "I dreamed some *great* ideas for camp; to modernize it and to give more freedom to the campers... "

Annabeth glowed as she smiled. "You're the boss, Percy."

Hestia smiled mischievously. "Does Zeus know that?"

Camp Reunion

(Percy is about 30-ish years old)

"Does anyone have any questions?"

Annabeth, my beloved wife, had just finished one of her four-hour presentations to the Olympic Council on proposed changes to Camp Half-Blood. Most of the gods looked like they'd prefer death to asking questions that might add time to the presentation. Ares looked like he wanted to kill; more so than usual, that is. Artemis looked like she wanted to change Annabeth into a deer and hunt her down. Poseidon looked like he needed a really long swim. You get the picture – they were restless. As was I was.

All we wanted was a school. But Olympus had turned it down year after year. We were frustrated and finally poured our hearts out to my parents one night when we'd taken the children (four of them, now!) to see them. My step-dad Paul explained to us how to approach a presentation to the committee that would be financing the proposal. "Propose ten times what you actually want and they'll approve a tenth of what you propose." So, my wife and I had brought to the Council a model of what we proposed to do with the camp. Baseball fields, soccer and football stadiums ... a bicycling velodrome and a swimming stadium ... It pretty much looked like we were planning on hosting the mortal version of the Olympics.

"There is no room for Nature," Demeter finally commented, hoping Annabeth didn't have a reply to launch into. She did have a reply ready, but before she could begin Zeus stood and shouted: "ENOUGH!" He approached the model and laid a finger on one single building – the most detailed of the model buildings as well as the brightest-painted – as if it was there to attract his attention. "This is *all* we'll agree to; *all* we will fund. We will send the cyclops tomorrow ... "

Annabeth's pretended look of disappointment should have won her an acting award - he'd laid his finger on the *one thing* we wanted. Which, of course, was why it was the brightest, most detailed part of the model.

"We would like it ready for the summer season, Lord Zeus," I said, also standing. "In time for the reunion."

"Reunion?"

"Yes, Lord Zeus. Last month Annabeth explained... "

"Hold your reunion," the lord of the gods said, cutting me off. "Whatever she got me to agree to – just go and hold it." He then

dissipated from the throne room to escape further discussion, most of the other gods following suit. Only Athena (Annabeths' mom) and Poseidon (my dad) remained, smiling broadly.

"Well done, children," Athena said, smiling. Poseidon nodded agreement, and then the two remaining Olympians also dissipated to wherever they go to recover from my wife's presentations.

Let me catch you up on a few things.

I almost hate being camp director. Too many headaches; too many little problems to solve. I can't do everything! The gods aren't any help; they just sit up there in Olympus and drink their nectar and complain that they're not being properly worshiped. Athena and Poseidon visit and care, but most of the time that's about it.

And paperwork! Oh, how I hate paperwork!

I need help! I can run the camp, and Chiron (yes, the same Chiron who taught Hercules and all those other early heroes, and yes, he's still a centaur) is a wonderful teacher, but there's subjects he's not as qualified to teach as well as, say, a god or even a demigod that need teaching to today's children. Like Ethics and Morality. Hera was coming down for a while, but even she's lost interest. I need a way to get camp alumni involved. That's where this dream of a school comes in.

Two weeks before the start of the summer season, the 'Academy at Camp Half-Blood' was completed – the day before the reunion was to be held. A state-of-the-art learning center, it was based on the ancient greek baths which had exercise compounds as well as porticoes for discussions groups. We added a new feature, however: between the male and female compounds is a computer learning center that was the best the gods could pay for. And they could pay for a lot.

Most of our campers (as you know) live at home with their families through the school year. Those who are year-rounders, however, just weren't getting the education they needed to get jobs and survive 21st century life. Hence the Academy. They'll do their school work through an on-line school with teachers roaming between desks to assist. They will *all* finally be high school graduates!

At the same time, head camp instructor Chiron and I had both agreed that camp alumni were needed to help teach and train the current campers. Sure, we've been able to get the gods to do it for a while, but their interest was waining and training was once again being left to the older campers. So, in conference with Hera, who's in charge of the

Demigod Birth Register, we convinced her that we needed the names of older demigods and not just the newly-born. (For some reason the camp hadn't kept records of who'd attended – thanks, Mister D!) To complete our scheme of recruiting teachers, invitations for a reunion had gone out and most had been RSVP'ed.

Let the recruiting – I mean the *Reunion* - begin!

When Annabeth had been hired to design and build the parts of Olympus that had been destroyed in the war against Kronos, she installed a few things we don't think Olympus is still completely aware of. We know, for instance, that the boundaries of Camp Half-Blood were continually watched by monsters who loved having demigods for dinner – and for any other meal for which they could capture and eat us. So, using the Daedalus technology from that laptop, Annabeth installed a tunnel connecting the camp to the basement levels of the Empire State Building – you *do* remember Olympus is currently hovering there at about the 600th floor level? Using Daedalus technology it was only about a one-hundred yard long tunnel that had to be dug but still it reaches all the way out to the north shore of Long Island where the camp is located and surfaces in the foyer of the new Academy. Something about dimensional shifts or some such thing – I've never been good at science.

So, as Half-Blood alumni began to arrive for the reunion, they simply entered the Empire State Building, hit the HB button in the elevator and stepped through the basement-level tunnel.

On opening day of the reunion about two-hundred folks showed up. Doctors, a few police, a bounty hunter and even some FBI agents. Oh, and the ambassador to the United Nations.

"Is this Little Rick?" Chiron exclaimed as he took one particular camper by the shoulder and squeezed him. They exchanged a few more words and then Chiron pointed out the direction of Little Rick's sleeping quarters. He was still smiling as 'Little Rick' wandered off to find said quarters. "A very good writer," the centaur explained. "Son of one of the Muses. Wrote detective stories for a while, and they were pretty good. But now he's writing fantasy based on the first, early quests he went on as a camper."

"*Streisand's* a demigod?" Annabeth was whispering as she pulled me to her and pointed as the woman stepped out of the Academy and shielded her eyes from the bright noon sun. It was obvious my wife hadn't read the entire guest list.

"Yes, she is," Chiron whispered back; "Which is probably why she had a hard time with her mortal mother." He then galloped off to get her to

sign a CD he had in a shoulder bag and even offered to escort her to her cabin.

Not everyone was famous. There were farmers and ranchers and forest rangers. There were oil rig workers and weather forecasters. There were Air Force pilots and an Army general. There were housewives who were proud of lives spent at the Hearth – and Hestia was telling several of them just how proud she was of them as well. There was a couple Olympic sport coaches as well as a couple of hard rock groups: an alternative all-male group called Fury-Us and a female grunge-rock quartet called the Harpettes.

“Geena Davis is wearing an Ares badge!” Annabeth was exclaiming; nearly giddy at the sight of her favorite actress. “That explains *so much!*”

“Yeah, but look at Vin Diesel,” I whispered back – he was wearing an Aphrodite badge. I am *not* making this up!

“Tell me Elvis is going to be here.”

“He's not,” our friend Nico confirmed as he joined us. (He's a son of Hades, but you know that.) “He really *is* dead.”

“Is he?” Annabeth challenged.

“He's performing at my dad's place right now; that's why I'm *here* and not *there*.”

“Karen Carpenter?” Annabeth was determined that some of these singers were not dead but just in hiding.

Nico quickly checked his watch with that 'oh! I forgot!' look on his face. “Her concert in Elysian Stadium starts in ten minutes, and I've got tickets... !” Needless to say the ground opened up and swallowed Nico, undoubtedly delivering him to a front row seat.

“The Academy hasn't opened yet,” I was explaining as Chiron and I led a guided tour of alumni through the new building. We'd already taken them around all the new cabins built since they'd last seen the camp, had lunch, and were now ready to pitch the new facility and watch for anyone we might be able to bring in as instructors. They'd been impressed with the central computer area and shown the choice of on-line schools students could choose from. We were now entering the male side of the traditional portion of the Academy. “We plan to open as soon as campers are out of school and here for the summer. This is the traditional entry – to the left is the changing area and toilets.” We continued on to the great courtyard. “In greek this area is called... ”

“Palastra,” a 50-ish looking man spoke up who was wearing a plain white name tag, which meant an Olympic parent had not yet claimed

him (yeah; there was an agreement at the end of the Kronos War, but most of the gods only confessed to camp-age kids and not to all remaining adults siblings who'd managed to survive a demigod puberty uneaten); "The exercise yard." Chiron and I both nodded. "Young men could exercise in whatever level of clothing they felt comfortable, being trained mostly in boxing and wrestling."

"Are the girls going to have the same level of training?" one of the older women asked.

"The women's side of this building is equal in every way to the men's side," piped in Annabeth.

"Are you sure?"

Annabeth smiled. "I'm the architect. All we need are female instructors."

"So the boys and girls are no longer going to exercise together?" the woman continued.

"All the sports they've done jointly in the past will continue that way," Annabeth replied. "As heroes they have to *not* hesitate to fight someone because of gender. But close bodily contact sports like wrestling," and Annabeth shook her head, "That's just too much contact for hormone-ridden teenagers."

"I see you also have adequate portico space," continued the 50-ish looking man with the white name tag. "Have you found instructors to conduct the discussions the ancient greeks held in these porticoes?"

I took a deep breath. "No, we haven't. Olympus has lost interest in teaching in the past few years, and quite frankly I'm not sure I'd want Olympus teaching morality and ethics to my campers." That comment produced snickers from most everyone. "The older campers have picked up the slack in physical training and such, as they always have. But for what you're asking – No, we don't have anyone yet."

We then led the group through the baths. The traditional tepidarium, where the initial washing was done, had been modernized to where bathers sat on a little stool at a faucet and washed before entering the caldarium – the room with the hot, steamy water that opens the pores and cleans them out – along with all the health and relaxation benefits of heat and steam. We then led them through the frigidarium, where one goes after the hot to cool off and close those pores back up. After quitting the bathing portion of the complex, Annabeth led the ladies in the group out and around the building so they could see for themselves that the female campers will have everything the male campers have but with a more-feminine decor.

That night the food court was crowded as everyone tried to sit in their traditional seating – at the table of the god one was a child of. After that we wandered our way down to the amphitheater, where Streisand and Neal Diamond led a sing-along and then sang some of their own numbers, Grover and other satyr accompanying some of the songs with their pipes. Fury-U's and the Harpettes ended the night with a few numbers each that I'm sure the current campers would have enjoyed more than these older folks.

The week-long reunion continued as the alumni relearned to sword fight, held chariot races, and even held a few Capture the Flag tournaments; an amazing thing to watch when it's chubby and/or middle-aged people playing it. There was a session where folks got to stand up and tell what they'd done since camp. And, there was a memorial service for friends who had passed over the River at which Streisand sang *'Run Wild'*, *'Deep River'*, and *'With One More Look at You'* – I didn't know the songs (my mom probably does), but they fit and a lot of people cried.

With two days left to the reunion, I spent an evening breaking in the men's side of the Academy – meaning, I stripped down and washed and crawled into the caldarium pool to see if the heat and steam could sweat some of the stress out of me.

I'm a terrible salesman; couldn't sell blood to a mosquito. All these alumni were very interested in what we were doing, but no volunteers. And I was too shy to ask.

"Father, what am I going to do?" I mumbled to myself.

"You're going to sit right here and wait for someone to come along." I heard my father's voice reply as his head and bare shoulders rose up out of the water. That's the thing about having Poseidon as a dad – he can show up anywhere there's water.

"Dad?"

Poseidon smiled. "One of the old folks is on his way here now; going to volunteer to help with this new Academy of yours."

"Are you sure?"

Poseidon smiled. "I saved his life one time; was foolish enough to swim while drunk, and I've just explained that it's payback time."

"I don't want teachers who are forced... "

Poseidon shook his head. "I wants to; he just hasn't been able to grasp your too-well-disguised pleas for help." My dad grinned. "You can slay monsters and pass math classes, but you're too shy to ask for help?"

Before I could answer Poseidon slid back under the water and was gone.

"May I join you?" It was the 50-ish looking man who knew his greek baths.

"Ah, sure," I replied.

He'd left his clothes in the changing room and had brought a towel. "I'm Pollix O'Grand," the man said by way of introduction. "People who don't want their face hurt call me Paul." He smiled as he slid down into the hot water – all the way to the neck. "Do you think you're going to be able to sell the kids on the benefits of this sort of bathing?"

I grinned wickedly. "I told them that opening up the pores and sweating them clean cuts down on zits. They're sold." We both chuckled. "So, where to you come from?"

"Basically lived everywhere with the Army. Was in Artillery until I went back to school and became a Chaplin."

"A Chaplin?"

"Yes; perfect person to hold those deep moral and philosophical discussions on the portico, don't you think?"

Speaking of answers to prayers... "What about the Army?"

"Retired a month ago and been looking for something worthwhile to do with my life."

"Like being grandfather to a whole new generation of demigods?" I asked hopefully.

"I'd want my own cabin."

"My wife could design one."

"She's quite a jewel, that one."

My only reply was a smile.

"I also have boxing and wrestling experience, although we really *do* need actual coaches."

"I was hoping for volunteers, which is why... "

"... why you arranged for this reunion?"

I grinned. "That was the original reason. But I've enjoyed it so much I'm looking forward to the next one."

"We'll make it an annual event, then."

"Are you, like, really planning all this?"

"Only if you're hiring me."

"I'm hiring you."

"Who's going to manage the womens' side of the Academy?"

"My mother-in-law's volunteered." I paused. "Athena. Only one of the Olympians actually interested."

Paul nodded. "As long as it isn't Hera. Jealous old bat... "

Paul and I talked for several hours, and we ended up so comfortable with each other that we'd wandered out into the palaistra (where the outdoor wrestling and boxing will be held with the young men dressed however they're comfortable) with just our towels, laying on the grass and looking up at stars as we planned a complete program for the future of the camp. Campers – especially the year-rounders, would be required to excel in four areas: Athletics (sword & knife fighting, javelin, archery, etc), Scholarship (school!), Artistry, and what Paul called 'Virtus', which is Latin for 'Virtue', which means 'strength' - not just 'being a virgin', but all kinds of moral strength. This is where he was going to take charge and teach ethics, morals, philosophy, and spirituality. Things kids today just aren't being taught. These would be taught in the discussion groups in the porticos ringing the lawn we were currently laying on.

"Oh," Chaplin Paul added, "and we need unicorns on the grounds. Patrolling and monitoring for any stray un-virtuous thoughts or actions."

"If you gentlemen will get dressed we'll join you," a voice called from the entryway. We did so and Annabeth and Athena joined us. I introduced Paul and began to outline what he and I had already discussed.

"Yes, I confess I've been listening in," Athena replied. "I think, Chaplin Paul, you are just what is needed."

Paul nodded respectfully. "The Kid here tells me you'll be doing the same thing in the Ladies' portico?"

She nodded. "Unicorns, however, are not greek; they're Persian."

"We can't use them?" Chaplin Paul asked.

"I did not say *that*..." And Athena smiled.

So, the next morning at breakfast, Chaplin Paul stands up and asks if he can take a few minutes.

"This new camp director may just be a kid (hey! I was thirty when he said that!) but he's certainly an improvement over Mister D," he boldly announces, and a cheer and applause broke out; Julie Andrews (daughter of the Muses) even put fingers to her mouth to whistle. It was all a little too enthusiastic for my modesty, but it was appreciated. "But what he hasn't told you is that he's a tad shy about asking for help. He's built this grand new Academy and is too shy to announce applications are being accepted.

"Who here has been layed off during this recession?" Too many hands went up. "Who here has been able to keep a marriage together with a mortal who didn't understand our 'divine nature'?" Too few hands went

up. "Who here is ready to give back to Camp Half-Blood for three square meals a day and a cabin to sleep in?"

I nearly cried when I saw the number of hands that went up.

So, by the end of the day Chaplin Paul and Athena had accepted applications for every position we'd hoped to staff with demigods. We even had a wrestling coach and a boxing coach for both genders - to prove she'd be a good wrestling coach, Jodie Foster had even wrestled sports coach Clarisse La Rue's head into the head ... with Annabeth leading the cheers ... there's a reason I shy away from female competition.

Reunions at Camp Half-Blood have now been moved to the final week of the summer session. Current campers get to meet the alumni and network with them for future opportunities, and final competitions in various sports are held with huge crowds of spectators. Yearly competitions and awards for artistic and scholastic fields are also held and awarded to the applause of all.

Best of all, the young campers now have have a multi-generational peer group of fellow demigods – they have begun to realize that they are *not* alone in the world and that there are "old people" who understand them and care.

Even for me - Yeah, Posideon's my dad but he's still a god and not exactly brimming with mortal advise. Step-dad Paul is really more of a friend than a mentor. Chiron is more of a mentor than those two are, but Chaplin Paul - he's a fellow demigod who's been in the same trenches I'm trying to fight my way through, and it just seems like he knows where all the landmines are placed and where all the snares are hidden and can somehow give all the right advise. To me he's the father-figure I needed - as well as the grandfather-figure the campers needed.

For me, the highlight of all the reunions held so far was at the closing ceremony of the fourth annual reunion, when Athena and Chiron called my friend and mentor Chaplin Paul to stand between them as they pointed to the sky and an Olympic emblem appeared over him – the camp's traditional way of an Olympic parent recognizing their child.

Yep, Chaplin Paul, the wise Old Man of the camp, my friend and mentor, is also my brother-in-law.

Two days later the sign on the Academy Headmaster's door was changed to read -

Athena & Son

From the same author on Facebooks

Grandpa Bruce's Poetry and Hymns, Volume One (2010)

A collection of poems and hymn texts; many written for children; just as many written on everyday topics and events. It is best viewed on an e-reader. If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

Faerie Prince of Temple Square (2010)

When you visit Salt Lake City's historical Temple Square at Christmastime and see millions of lights in the trees and bushes, have you ever asked yourself: Are they lights or are they – Faeries? If I find typo's, the corrected verions will be in my "Grandpa Bruce's Gem Mine of Short Stories". If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

Night Bird Canyon - a Story of Friends and Fiends (2010)

Subtitled 'A Vampire Among the Mormons', this classical Gothic horror story takes place in Northern Utah's Cache Valley in the early years of the Depression. It's not about Mormons or Mormonism; that's just the setting for this classical Good versus Evil tale. I apologize for the twist at the end in the introduction of a well-known character, but I just couldn't help myself. If I find typo's, the corrected verions will be in my "Grandpa Bruce's Gem Mine of Short Stories". If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

Pilgrim's Progress: Latter-day Sequels (2010)

April 2011: Short Story Added ... One book and several short stories inspired by Bunyan's classic volume. The book is the story of four of Christian and Chrstiana's grandsons on their pilgrimage, looking through the field glasses of the Latter-day Saint branch of Christianity. Those who believe Latter-day Saints are heretics and Satan-worshipers, I ask that you read with an open heart and allow yourself to be amazed at how much Christianity you're going to find. Also includes short stories about attractions at Vanity Fair as well as a brand new INDEX & CONCORDANCE for all the

works in this book. If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at:
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

DAY TRIPS to NARNIA (2010)

Story added September 2011 ... A collection of 'fan fiction' short stories based on C. S. Lewis' world of Narnia. Although written for fun, most are moralistic in nature - but I think you will enjoy them anyway. Obviously, Narnia and anything to do with it is owned and copyrighted; hence this is merely 'fan fiction' and not copyrighted. If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

Men and Depression: One Man's Journey (2010)

Having lived a lifetime of chronic and suicidal depression, I've compiled things I've written on the topic to be a guidebook and inspiration to those following me along the path. This is in no way a professional medical or mental health text; it is simply one's man's experiences and what he has learned. If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

Faith, Grace, & Works: a Chord in the Hymn of Salvation (2010)

Christians have debated for centuries whether they are saved by Faith, by Grace, or by Works. This author believes each of these principles plays a role and seeks to show the role each plays in a Christian's progress towards salvation. If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

Pilgrim's Progress: People & Place Concordance (2010)

Updated Sept. 2010 ... In all my years of reading this classic John Bunyan book, I've never yet found a people & place concordance ... so, here's my first draft of one. If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

Harry Potter - Three Short Stories (2010)

Three short "fan fiction" stories that take place before, during, and at the end of the books we've all read how-many times. First a story about Professor McGonagall, then one about Charley Wesley and dragons, and the last is my own 'final chapter' to the last book (she didn't even give us a memorial service for our friends!) If you enjoy, please come and discuss at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

The Power of Hymns (2010)

Music and song have a power like no other. Hymns, to me, are the most powerful of all music. This is a compilation of my own writings on the subject coupled with addresses and quotes from others. If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

Grandpa Bruce's Short Stories (2010)

Like a gem mine, you find rocks and you find gems. Hopefully you find more gems in this book than rocks. If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

From Boy to Man and Back Again (2010)

BOOK 1 of my Narnia "fan fiction" novels; takes place in the months leading up to the beginning of the Hundred-Year Winter. It tells how and why the Tree of Protection died and how the witch Jadis came to power. It also lets you know something else that was made from the wood of that tree from which the Wardrobe had been built. If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

Camilla: Warrior of Narnia (2010)

BOOK 3 of my Narnia 'fan fiction' novels. Taking place in the time of Princess SwanWhite, a 10-year-old girl facing surgery for major burns is taken to Narnia to learn real heroism. She and Princess SwanWhite both learn why, as Father Christmas stated to Queens Susan and Lucy, war is so very terrible when women must fight. If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

Second Chance (2010)

BOOK 4 of my Narnia 'fan-fiction' novels, this is dedicated with deepest respect to my fellow brothers and sisters in the Armed Forces of whatever country they serve. PARENTAL NOTE: This story is about a grown-up going to Narnia and deals with themes that affect grown-ups as well as children: healing from suicide, child abuse, illegitimate birth, and the physical and mental scars soldiers carry from their wartime experiences. These themes are dealt with in a very straight-forward but tactful and respectful manner. Parents may want to read this story first. I promise you it all turns out good in the end - all the correct decisions are made by my characters in regards to these topics - Aslan makes sure of this. If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

LDS Lists & Figures (2010)

UPDATED October 2011 - I created this file of information on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) simply to have the material on hand in my own e-reader and am sharing it with you: membership statistics; presidents of the Church; temples; official proclamations; a few missionary tracts; statements concerning the LDS Church and the U.S. Constitution. I will update as needed, usually with each General Conference.

"Ye Who Are Weary – Come Home": a 'Mormon' Werewolf (2010)

THIS IS NOT A CHILDREN'S STORY. Although the wording is tactful, there are startling images.

There are two paths to take with a werewolf story – the first path is spilled over with blood and carnage, while the second path carries the themes of being Forsaken and then Redeemed. I'm a Sunday School teacher – I'm taking the second route as I think Redemption and Deliverance are far more important than all the exciting violence and blood and gore such a story could contain ... Aren't they?

My proofreaders tell me that you deserve to be warned that Edgar Rice Burroughs and H. G. Wells are two of my favorite authors,

and since this takes place in much the same time period in which they were writing, I have tried to emulate the language of that time, which means it's pretty long-winded for today's readers. It is also stuffed full of religion – the 'Mormon' culture to be exact. Some things that are talked about are very sacred to we Latter-day Saints, and I think I have carefully balanced the attempt of keeping the sacred while writing a good story. If you think some of the sacred is silly I only hope you can show it the respect you would wish we would show to your sacred things.

The Whole Armor of God – A Latter-day Saint View (2010)

There are many Christians in the world today who object to the 'warrior view' of the Gospel of Christ. They won't let their children read the military campaigns in the scriptures or even sing the 'battle' hymns. Like it or not, we are in the midst of a war; a battle begun before the earth was even created, and turning our eyes away from it and pretending it doesn't exist is exactly what the Enemy wants. This book is meant to be a 'field guide', describing the battle at hand and those armor pieces the Lord has provided for us to use in the battle. Please come and discuss at: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=120610104646392>

Pilgrim's Progress: Annotated (2010)

UPDATED Jan 22, 2011 - This is my personal working copy of this classic John Bunyan book - hard words and old phrases & expressions defined. I've never liked "modern language" versions of this book; I would rather lift myself up to its language than to dummy it down to mine. Enough of my friends have asked me to share that, well, here you go. I have included Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1846 'The Celestial Railroad' as every reader of Pilgrim's Progress ought to read it, too.

Horse Boy of Narnia (2011)

BOOK 2 of my Narnia Fan Fiction Novels and a conclusion to Book One, this takes place during the 14-year reign of the High Kings and Queens and tells the story of Charlie, a boy Aslan brings to Narnia to learn Courage, Sacrifice, and a bit of Wisdom. Charlie is sure that if he were a centaur he could learn these things - be careful of what you wish for because you might get it! If you enjoy this, please come and discuss at:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php#!/group.php?gid=120610104646392>



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Food for the mind