

SBC picks Hunt on 1st ballot

June 9, 2008

Johnny Hunt, pastor of First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Ga., won the Southern Baptist Convention presidential election on the first ballot June 10 in Indianapolis.

Hunt received 3,100 votes (52.94 percent) out of 5,856 ballots cast.

He defeated a field of five other candidates. They and their vote totals were:

- Frank Cox, pastor of North Metro First Baptist Church in Lawrenceville, Ga., 1,286 votes; 21.96 percent.
 - Avery Willis, retired vice president of the SBC International Mission Board, 962 votes; 16.43 percent.
 - Bill Wagner, a former missionary and president of Olivet International University in San Francisco, 255 votes; 4.35 percent.
 - Les Puryear, pastor of Lewisville (N.C.) Baptist Church, 188 votes; 3.21 percent.
 - Wiley Drake, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Buena Park, Calif., and a former SBC second vice president, 45 votes; 0.77 percent.
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1st VP and more motions

June 9, 2008

Kentucky pastor Bill Henard won the Southern Baptist Convention's first vice presidency in a landslide June 10.

Henard defeated two challengers, receiving 1,748 votes—or 73.23 percent of 2,387 ballots cast—during the SBC annual meeting in Indianapolis.

Henard is pastor of Porter Memorial Baptist Church in Lexington, Ky., president of the Kentucky Baptist Convention and chairman of the board of the SBC's LifeWay Christian Resources.

He defeated John Connell, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Savannah, Ga., who received 377 votes (15.79 percent) and Crist Camden, pastor of Oconee Heights Baptist Church in Athens, Ga., who got 224 votes (9.38 percent).

In other business, messengers approved the SBC order-of-business committee's recommendations on eight additional motions presented earlier in the day. They included proposals calling for:

- Declaring Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, to be not “in friendly cooperation” with the SBC. The church has engaged in a public dispute this year regarding whether or not homosexual couples could be pictured together as families in the church's directory. The church ultimately determined to publish a historical booklet with directory information, but it would not include photographs of families.

Result: Referred to the Executive Committee. Since the church did not send messengers to the Indianapolis meeting, the order-of-business committee determined the convention did not face a credentials issue. But it suggested compliance with the SBC's policy against affiliating with

churches that “affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior” merits study by the Executive Committee.

- Amending SBC bylaws to add requirements for all individuals nominated to serve on SBC committees, commissions and boards. The proposal would require nominees to “give evidence of having received Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior,” hold membership in a church that supports the SBC Cooperative Program unified budget, be in good standing with a local church, abstain from using alcoholic beverages and recreational drugs, and “support all the principles” in the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message doctrinal statement.

Result: Referred to the Executive Committee.

- Creating a “standardized form” on which the SBC’s six seminaries would report their enrolment and other data.

Result: Referred to the Executive Committee.

- Changing the length of terms and number of terms that may be served by trustees of the SBC’s agencies and institutions.

Result: Referred to the Executive Committee.

- Publishing the SBC’s Baptist Faith & Message in the five most dominant languages represented within the convention.

Result: Referred to LifeWay Christian Resources, which prints the Baptist Faith & Message.

- Considering bylaw changes that would direct convention agencies and institutions to “accommodate other events that support the work and mission of Southern Baptists” during the week in which the annual meeting is held each summer.

Result: Referred to the Executive Committee.

- Instructing the six SBC seminaries to charge students who take classes over the Internet the same tuition rates they charge on-campus students.

Result: Ruled out of order, since messengers cannot tell boards of SBC agencies what to do, but can only request that they consider proposals.

- Forbidding program personalities at SBC annual meetings from reading from or citing LifeWay Christian Resources' Holman Christian Standard Bible "or any translation that questions the validity of any Scripture or verse" during any official convention meeting or in any SBC literature.

Messenger Eric Williams of Belle Rive, Ill., claimed editors of the Holman Christian Standard Bible "believe that there are verses in the (biblical) text that do not belong in the Bible."

Result: Ruled out of order, since messengers cannot tell boards of SBC agencies what to do, but can only request that they consider proposals.

To tithe, or not to tithe

June 9, 2008

Should you tithe?

For most Baptists of a certain age, the answer is easy: "Yeah, sure." Of course, answering correctly and actually doing anything about it aren't the same.

In our house, my sister, brother and I learned to tithe before we even had any money. Every Sunday, each of us carried an envelope to Sunday school,

and on the line behind the dollar sign, Mother wrote an amount that equaled our prorated share of Daddy and Mother's tithe on their wages. Then, when we had money, we were expected to tithe it, too.

In fact, seems like one of my first "come to Jesus" conversations had to do with whether or not I should tithe my birthday money. Around our house, "storehouse" tithing extended far, far beyond wages Uncle Sam could tabulate. We were expected to tithe on birthday money, Christmas presents and the occasional surprise dollar that arrived in the mail from a grandparent. Later, by the time I got my first "job," I wasn't even inclined to debate tithing with my pastor/daddy. Although, in retrospect, I recall trying to figure out a good way to give the Lord a tenth of the quarter I earned each week for picking up Sunday bulletins and straightening hymnals in our little church's sanctuary. On the advice of very good spiritual counsel, I rounded up. Jesus got a nickel.

The faithful 5

Well, apparently Mother and Daddy were in the minority in teaching us to tithe. Tithing hasn't exactly caught on among Americans. In fact, a recent [survey](#) by [The Barna Group](#), a religion research firm, revealed only 5 percent of American adults tithe. You really ought to [read](#) the results.

On the up side, the survey showed that 24 percent of evangelicals—the religious category that represents most Baptists—are tithers. That's almost five times better than the national rate.

On the down side, tithers still represent slightly less than one in four supposedly committed Christians. (This finding reflects the longstanding 80/20 Rule: 80 percent of the members of a church or other volunteer organization do only 20 percent of the work, leaving 20 percent of the members to do 80 percent of the work. Same goes for financing the church or organization.)

Age-old debate

Just about every time I write about tithing, I get letters from folks who say something along the lines of: “Tithing doesn’t apply to the Christian church. Tithing is an Old Testament concept. Neither Jesus nor the New Testament taught tithing. You’re just being legalistic when you say Christians should tithe.”

Legalistically, they’re correct. But you’d think a faith built upon a Founder who sacrificed his very life for his followers would exceed, not fall below, the standards of the practices that preceded it. OK, so Jesus didn’t preach tithing. But Jesus died so that you can have eternal life. How are you going to respond? You’d think such sacrifice would compel Christians to demonstrate their love and gratitude far beyond the old practice. You’d think every Christian would give at least 10 percent of income back to God, and they’d want to do more, more, more.

Love, not legalism

Unlike my childhood requirement to tithe on my birthday money and the quarter I made picking up bulletins, our gifts to God should be motivated by love and gratitude. Health-and-wealth preachers aside, the “blessing” of tithing comes from the way you feel when you give a portion of your means back to God. It’s kind of like the first time you were in love, and you couldn’t do enough to make the object of that love happy. Every gift you gave originated in a heart of love, and that love grew by giving.

By the way, a corollary to tithing should be volunteering time and talent to strengthen and empower the cause of Christ. What if every Christian tithed time and talent? Just think of the impact for Christ we could have on our communities and world.

Looming crisis

If trends continue, churches are going to have an increasingly difficult time funding their ministries. Sylvia Ronsvalle, executive vice president of [Empty Tomb](#) , an organization that tracks Christian charitable giving, predicts disaster. “There could be a crisis in the very heart of the church,” she told [Religion News Service](#) .

Ultimately, tithing isn’t about “ought-ness.” It’s not about legalism or the expectations of others. It’s about (a) faithfulness to God, (b) gratitude for Christ and (c) whether or not the kingdom of God as expressed by its churches is going to have the financial capacity to do the work of Christ in the world today.

Texas WMU needs our prayers

June 9, 2008

“How could such a fine, first-rate organization fall so far so fast?” That question has sounded the common refrain as folks have talked about Texas Woman’s Missionary Union lately. WMU needs our prayers.

For 128 years, Woman’s Missionary Union has provided Texas Baptists with strong leadership in missions education, missions action and missions support. WMU has paved the way for inspiring Texas Baptists to roll up our sleeves and get about the business of fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission to go across the state and around the world with the gospel.

On an educational level, WMU has trained generations of children, girls

and women about what being a “Great Commission Christian” really means. Thousands and thousands of Texas Baptists—women and men alike—first learned about missionaries and the priority of missions as Sunbeams (I’m showing my age) and Mission Friends. The Lord only knows how many women first felt God’s tug on their heartstrings in GAs and Acteens. And countless churches have been strengthened by the leadership development that shaped their female members in WMU.

On a financial level, WMU has made missions possible for the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions has financed foundational missions programs, such as church starting and outreach to people of many ethnicities and languages. And it has provided the seed money for many of the BGCT’s greatest innovations, such as compassionate ways to reach the most vulnerable Texans and creative ways to reach new generations of Texans. Our convention, and the kingdom of God, would have been tremendously diminished were it not for the leadership of WMU and the liquidity of the Mary Hill Davis Offering.

Disturbing developments

Although leaders have been mum about the details, Texas WMU obviously is passing through one of the most difficult, tenuous times in its history. Last fall, Executive Director-Treasurer Carolyn Porterfield summarily resigned. Last month, the WMU Executive Board summarily fired the interim executive, Nina Pinkston. And the method was ugly: She showed up at a staff retreat only to find the staff wasn’t coming. She called the office to learn she had been relieved of her duties, and they would ship her belongings to her. This was shoddy, unprofessional treatment of a respected former missionary who had labored to keep the ailing organization on its feet. These losses have been compounded by the resignations and early retirements of four longtime employees—Waunice Newton, Ruby Vargas, Cathy Gunnin and Judy Champion.

All this has caused Texas Baptists who love WMU to grieve and to ask, “How could such a fine, first-rate organization fall so far so fast?”

Recognizing a problem

Texas WMU’s crisis has prompted response from two groups—all eight living former presidents, as well as 59 “friends of WMU of Texas.” Their concerns should be heeded. To see a news story about both groups, click [here](#) .

The friends sent a letter to the WMU board of directors that says, “This esteemed organization seems to be moving in a direction contrary to her historic principles and practices. We are deeply disturbed and wonder how this could have happened.” The letter calls upon the WMU board to “put aside any reticence and consider your responsibilities as board members.” It also affirms the desire to “move ahead in truth and honor as ‘laborers together with God.’”

The former presidents have called for prayer for WMU, particularly for the board meeting June 16-17. The presidents also ask the board to consider hiring an experienced intentional interim.

Good idea

Concerned Texas Baptists don’t have to be missiologists to see things are amiss in our iconic missions organization. We need to pray for Texas WMU. In the meantime, the WMU board should follow the former presidents’ advice. The pattern of the past eight months indicates deep problems within Texas WMU. The organization needs to right itself before expecting a new executive director-treasurer to take up the mantle of leadership.

Into the future

June 9, 2008

Our mission statement declares: “Baptist Standard Publishing exists to inform, inspire, equip and empower people to follow Christ and expand the Kingdom of God.” Our charter mandates that the Standard “support the Baptist General Convention of Texas and ... interpret events and movements that affect the welfare of the people of God.” We measure everything we do by those foundational guidelines.

For almost 12 decades, that meant doing one thing—publishing an honest, factual newspaper that covered the Baptist General Convention of Texas and its affiliated churches. Generations of editors and readers measured the Baptist Standard by how well it told the Baptist story. We benefited from several factors that worked in our favor:

- From the beginning in 1888, Texas Baptists have understood an unfettered press serves the best interests of both the convention and the newspaper. The BGCT blossomed in large part because the Standard was free to tell the whole story of all that transpired. Controversy, economic challenges and changing circumstances are not new for Texas Baptists. Our history is recorded in the stories of such obstacles and opportunities. And our history is written in the pages of the Standard. Fortunately, Texas Baptists read that history week by week and responded with courage, passion and wisdom. Because Texas Baptists have known the issues that confront them—because they read about them in their paper—they have risen to every occasion.

- Texas Baptists also have understood financial independence is the price of a free press. Before the Standard became an agency of the BGCT in 1914, the convention required the previous owners to pay off all the newspaper’s debt. Since then, the Standard has been the only state Baptist

paper that is not subsidized by the Cooperative Program unified budget. The challenge, of course, has been keeping the Standard afloat financially through all kinds of hard times. The blessing, however, is that the Standard has remained uniquely free. No other denominational publication has been so free of bureaucratic control and financial manipulation.

- The board and editors have realized such freedom also implies tremendous responsibility. We have not cherished freedom for freedom's sake alone. We have not sought to maintain freedom just so the editor can say whatever he wants. The Standard has insisted on freedom because we believe all Texas Baptists deserve to know what's going on in their convention and what factors and issues are shaping their churches. We have exercised this freedom as a responsibility. We have understood we are stewards of our freedom precisely because our freedom helps ensure Texas Baptists' freedom.

Some things change, but everything else ...

Although Texas and our convention have changed dramatically through the years, our responsibility to exercise the Standard's freedom by reporting the news fairly and accurately has not changed a bit. In fact, that responsibility never will change. The strength and vitality of our convention depends upon Texas Baptists' access to the news. Reporting the news always will be Job 1 for the Standard.

Aside from that, just about everything else about our ministry is changing.

You're looking at the most obvious change to impact journalism since the invention of the printing press. That's right, the Internet. We're still committed to printing a newspaper. But we can deliver the news faster, more broadly and less expensively online. As time goes by, more and more of our readership will migrate to the web. That's a good thing, because we can do a better, more thorough job reporting through a medium that is

instantaneous and whose boundaries are almost infinite.

But the unprecedented capacity of the web poses a whole set of new questions. Up until now, we've only had space to print news, feature stories and some opinion pieces. But lately, we've been asking: What else? What do Baptists need that we can provide? Would they like and benefit from a broader array of content, products and services? If so, what should they be? How about daily devotionals? Missions materials? Seasonal worship plans, like Advent guides? And could they use chatrooms and new blogs and others ways to build "community" around affinities, ministries and/or passions?

We're thinking hard

At its spring meeting May 13, the Baptist Standard board of directors engaged this challenge head-on. They authorized Chairman Rusty Walton to create an ad hoc strategy committee to work with the staff and develop a master plan for the future of our organization. This committee will consider adding staff to provide resources. But it will look at the future much more expansively, considering the prospects for both print and online communication, staff structure, funding and decision-making.

The goal of this special committee is to enable the Standard to excel at accomplishing its mission, because informing, inspiring, equipping and empowering Christians, following Christ and expanding the Kingdom of God are goals that never change.

What you can do

Please keep this committee—as well as the full board and all the staff—in your prayers. We need them.

And if you have ideas for how we can better fulfill our mission, let us know. You can comment on this blog right now. We'll be grateful.

Speak up

June 9, 2008

You may not expect this from a bunch of journalists, but this new website reflects our Baptist theology.

We believe in the twin doctrines of soul competency and the priesthood of all believers. Soul competency is the idea that God has created all people—every individual—with the capacity to relate directly to God. We’re all “competent” to approach God directly, of our own free will, and to have a loving, abiding relationship with God. And the priesthood of all believers means we don’t need any pope, priest, pastor, rabbi, imam or other spiritual intermediary to stand between us and God, to be our intermediary with God.

This is why, for 399 years, Baptists have practiced democracy in our churches, associations and conventions. Since we believe God has made each believer a free priest with direct access to God, then each individual should be free to participate in and give direction to our corporate life together. So, we’re big voters. Every so often, we gather together to do business, and each vote is both a practical matter of making decisions and a theological assertion of our belief in soul competency and the priesthood of all believers.

Theology of news

That’s why communication always has been important to Baptists. If we expect Baptists to make good decisions, then we all need access to accurate information about the issues and challenges before us. For generations, Baptists have published newspapers to help participants in

their societies and conventions understand their common concerns so they can make good decisions and rise to their opportunities. As a newspaper, the *Baptist Standard* has been facilitating this kind of communication for 120 years.

For about a decade or so, the *Standard* has placed everything that goes in the print edition on the Internet, too. In fact, for most of that time, we've actually published more online than in print—like Bible study lessons, extra letters to the editor, even news and feature stories that just didn't fit in the print edition.

But with this new website, we've laid the foundation to do much more.

This is where you come in

One of the most significant components of our new site is the comment feature. We're giving you the opportunity to add your comments to our blogs, editorials, news stories and just about everything we post online. We're not just giving you that opportunity; we want you to comment. One of the main reasons is because we actually believe all that soul competency/priesthood of all believers stuff. When you read something, have an idea and share it, we're all enriched.

I'll tell you the first time I realized I wanted to add comments to the *Standard* website. It was May 25, 2007, the day Herbert Reynolds died. Dr. Reynolds was president emeritus of Baylor University and had been a gracious friend and mentor to me. Instinctively, I clicked on the [Waco Tribune-Herald](#) website to see if I could find more details. The *Trib* already had added a comment feature to its news stories, and throughout the day, friends and former students added their tributes to a life well-lived. Their beautiful stories provided a poignant dimension to the reporter's article, and I wanted the *Baptist Standard* to give our readers that opportunity to inform and inspire each other.

So, all of us here hope you'll participate. Of course, you still can send letters to the editor. But we also want you to feel free to comment when you're inspired by an article, editorial, letter, blog or other item. Your "voice" is important.

OK, here's the catch

In order to comment, you have to register. It's easy. Even I can do it. Right now, we've placed a couple of registration links on our homepage. One is a button on the top of the left column. The other is a link in the bottom-left corner of my blog box. Either link will take you to a confidential form where you can sign up, get your password and get started.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Next time

One more blog about what we hope to do with this site. Then we'll move on. (I promise.)

So many choices

June 9, 2008

Before I started writing a blog, I figured keeping it up would be the hardest part. How well I'll actually do at coming up with blog fodder remains to be seen, since this is only my second outing.

Oh, yeah, and fair warning: I don't promise to update this thing every morning. Unlike some people, I've got both (a) a pretty demanding day job and (b) a life.

But I'll do my best to post something new quite regularly. And I'll try my hardest to make it interesting, so visiting this spot will be worth your while.

First mental block

Where was I? Oh, yeah-the hardest part of blogging. Once I actually started thinking about blogging, I realized the first hurdle would be coming up with a title. Crikey, naming that baby is more complicated than everybody lets on.

Some of you know I've written a column-first in the Western Recorder and now, for more than a dozen years, in the *Baptist Standard*-called "Down Home." When I started, my daughters were 4 and 7, and my home life was full, busy and funny. (For several years there, I thought I was funny, because my column was funny. Later, I discovered my column was funny because little kids are funny. Unfortunately, we all grew out of that phase.)

A few friends suggested I call the blog "Down Home," just to maintain continuity. Problem is, that column's mostly about my-you're going to be surprised here-home life. Now that Joanna and I live in an "empty nest," coming up with a home-based column every-other week is about often enough. No matter how hard I plead, she won't give me more babies so I'll have more and better material for new columns. She keeps referring to my request as "too great a sacrifice."

And although Topanga is the world's cutest dog, a canine can't support a blog three times a week. So, "Down Home" is out of the running.

With the easy answer blocked, so is my mind. This is getting harder by the minute. Sometimes, the blog may focus on breaking news. Sometimes, light-hearted stuff. Other times, news of the weird. And who knows, maybe even a whole lot of pieces about faith and life and how to try to be a serious Christ-follower in a world where things usually are more complicated than they seem. How can a blog title cover all the possibilities?

So many options

After staring at my computer screen for about 30 seconds shy of an eternity, I did what any embarrassed-but-desperate guy does when he drives off into the mud and gets stuck. I called (actually e-mailed) my friends to pull me out.

The replies ranged from the cute, to the profound, to the quirky, to the, well, crude. I know some of you out there are dying to know what kind of crude blog names a Baptist editor's friends would suggest. Well, guess.

One particularly clever friend argued that a blog title really is a brand, and the specifics don't matter. In time, people will associate the blog with the title and the writer, but they won't ponder the meaning of the title. He said I could name it after my favorite food, and nobody would care. So, how about it? "Pollo ala Mexicana," for the hottest dish on the lunch menu at Gloria's in Oak Cliff. Or maybe "No. 10," for the best chile relleno on the planet, from Matt's in Lakewood. Another possibility would be "Mama's Fried Chicken," from the kitchen table of one Margaret Knox. I'd gain 143 pounds because I'd get so hungry every time I had to write my blog.

At last count, I'd received 51 suggestions, and I still haven't settled on a name for this baby. Here are a few possibilities, along with comments:

- "Truth Be Told"-In my last "Down Home," I said this would be the title, but now I'm not so sure. A friend whose judgment I trust says it's a little too smug and self-assured.
- "Truth? Be Told"-The question mark adds a touch of humility. But it looks kinda awkward after "truth" and sounds weird after "told."
- "Faithcasting"-If only I could fish.
- "Mercy, Mercy Me"-Lord, I need it.
- "iMarv"-Cute, but the trendy "i" will be blasé soon enough.
- "Marv"-Well, that's me. And I've got a strange-enough name that it sorta stands out.

- "op-Knox-ious"-Another play on my name, and the "op" signals a blog is, after all, opinion. But folks who hate me would enjoy this one waaaaay too much.
- "Speaking Freely"-This title received a plurality of votes when I polled the *Baptist Standard* staff. I love 'em, but this one hasn't grabbed me. Yet.
- "Don't Shoot"-If you appreciate insider humor with a historical twist, this would be your fave. J.B. Cranfill, the first editor of the *Baptist Standard*, lost his job after he got in a gunfight while riding on a train bound for the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Nashville a century ago. Some people call me cranky, but at least I haven't shot anybody. Yet.
- "But Some of My Best Friends are Baptists." True, but probably too long. Guess I could choose this title and shorten the everyday name to "BSMBFB."

Help

What do you think? Like any of these? Got a better idea? Tell me. Click on the response button. Register (you'll thank me later). And fire away. Waiting to hear from you.

Next time ...

How can the new *Baptist Standard* website help build community among Baptists? So glad you asked.

Off on a new adventure

June 9, 2008

Welcome to the new *Baptist Standard* website. We've been thinking about you and working on this design for a long time. I'll spare you all the gory details, but suffice it to say I've got 3-year-old e-mails documenting the discussion that brought us to this day. Of course, in Internet time, that was several generations ago. This new website uses technology that wasn't even available when we started thinking about and longing for a better site.

And like any good relationship, this site isn't finished yet. Every day, we'll add things—content for sure, but also products and services—to make it better and better. We hope and pray you'll soon feel you can't let a day pass without drawing upon the resources we offer at baptiststandard.com. We're even bold enough to believe many of you will make baptiststandard.com your homepage because it connects you to “all things Baptist” in ways you only dreamed were possible.

New resources for you

Speaking of resources, the *Baptist Standard's* mission is to “inform, inspire, equip and empower people to follow Christ and expand the Kingdom of God.” For right at 120 years, we've interpreted that to mean providing accurate, reliable and timely news about Baptists here in Texas and God's work around the world. That always will be Job 1.

But as we've talked to our readers, we've come to realize we can't fulfill our mission unless we provide a broader range of resources—products and services that strengthen individual Christian believers, build better churches and help all of us fulfill Christ's Great Commission and Great Commandment.

So, we're trying to figure out how to do just that. Although you can't see all

of it right now, this new website has been built upon infrastructure that will enable us to give you much more than news. We've got some ideas about where we're headed, but I don't even want to speculate about them just yet. Right now, we're cooperating with our publishing partners—the Associated Baptist Press news service, Virginia's *Religious Herald* and Missouri's *Word & Way*—to research the possibilities. Also, the *Baptist Standard's* board of directors has created a strategy committee to determine what we need to do to support this venture. We're thinking about adding a resources editor—an unprecedented step for a religious news journal—to focus full time on creating non-news content for our website. Please keep us in your prayers.

Tell us what you need

Meanwhile, we're going to work hard every day to serve you better. You can help by telling us what you need. To suggest news and feature story ideas, contact Managing Editor [Ken Camp](#) . To offer ideas for improving our site, get in touch with [John Rutledge](#) , our webmaster. If you have questions about advertising on our site or want to know more about how we can help you market your church or ministry, write to Marketing Director [Brad Russell](#) . And if you love what we're doing and want to know how you can help us expand our ministry and strengthen our website, reach out to [Tom Ruane](#) , our development director. For just about anything else—resources you'd like us to offer, ideas for improvement, you name it—contact me, [Marv Knox](#) .

Next time ...

OK, and one more thing: I'm not so sure what to call this blog. But we'll save that discussion for another day ...