

Down Home: NASCAR, friendship & a gazillion decibels

April 19, 2013

Brent turned and looked at me.

“What happened to your guy?” I screamed into his face so loudly I figured I’d make myself hoarse.

He raised his eyebrows quizzically and hollered back at me. I couldn’t hear what he said, but I read his lips: “Huh?”

Brent briefly removed the headset covering his left ear, and I screamed into it, again, emphasizing every syllable: “Whaaaat happp-pened tooo yoooor guuuuuy?”

He covered his ear with his headset and shrugged.

This went on for four hours.

We had a great time at the NASCAR race.

Really. We did.

Brent and I have been good buddies since the spring of 1986, when Joanna and I moved to Nashville and joined the church where he and Jackie and their daughters, Alayna and Andrea, were members. We brought our older daughter, Lindsay, and our younger daughter, Molly, came along that fall.

Our families hit it off. And in the four and a half years we all lived in the same town and attended the same church, we forged a friendship that has withstood the parallel obstacles of time and distance.

Texas Motor Speedway

So, Joanna and I looked forward to a reunion since late last year. That's when Brent called. He said his Christmas present from Alayna and her husband, Clayton, was a trip to Texas Motor Speedway—25 miles from our home in Coppell—for the spring NASCAR Sprint Cup race.

Originally, only Brent and Alayna were driving out from their home in Memphis, Tenn., and we made sure they planned to stay at our house the nights before and after the race.

Later, Brent called to ask if I wanted to go to the race, too. It seems Alayna decided Clayton should come. And then Brent said he wanted to invite a friend. He's a smart husband, and he knew Jackie wouldn't have anything to do with spending a chunk of a day and most of a night out at the racetrack.

So, I said, "Sure." That's what friends do. They say, "Sure" when friends really, really want to do something.

To be quite honest, I don't know much about NASCAR.

NASCAR ignorance

When Lindsay and Molly were on the high school drill team, we cooked corndogs at the races to raise money for the booster club. About once a race, we'd slip into the grandstands for a few minutes and watch the cars zoom the track. But that was it.

Other than that, here's what I knew about NASCAR: A nice young woman named Danica Patrick is the only female driver. One of the most popular drivers is Dale Earnhardt Jr., who is famous because his daddy was a great driver who died in a crash. A guy named Jeff Gordon is a good driver, but lots of fans don't seem to like him much. The cars are fast and loud.

That's about it.

Brent tried to educate me. He told me about his favorite driver, Tony Stewart, whose car is No. 14, and Alayna's favorite driver, No. 99, Carl Edwards.

Out at the track, I learned the biggest deal is cheering for a driver. That's sort of ironic, because the cars make so much noise, a driver couldn't hear cheering if a million people—much less only 200,000 fans—were screaming like banshees.

Well, I couldn't make up my mind. Brent said I couldn't root for Gordon, and I felt silly picking Patrick just because she's a woman, and I didn't want to pick Brent's or Alayna's favorites.

So, when the race started, I picked No. 56, because I liked his car. It's blue, and it's sponsored by Napa auto parts, and I use Napa auto parts. Later, I learned the driver's name is Martin Truex Jr., and Brent said he was a "good guy."

Watching NASCAR when you don't know beans about it is problematic.

The race raised so many questions. About how they prepare and tweak the cars. About what goes on during pit stops. About strategy and about how members of the same team help each other while driving almost 200 miles per hour. About how you watch cars drive around the same track 334 times without losing your mind.

Best part is the finish

The best part of the race was the finish. My guy came in second. I don't remember where Alayna's and Brent's drivers finished because they pretty much stunk up the joint.

And even though we couldn't share more than about two-dozen words all night, I thoroughly enjoyed sharing a big-time experience with friends I've

loved for more than two-dozen years.

One of God's best gifts is deep and abiding friendship. The experiences you share within that friendship just give you something to talk about.

Even if the stock cars are raising such a racket you can't hear what your friend is saying.