

The PACKARD PRESS

A collection of thoughts and stories to educate, entertain, and inspire.

RAISED BY SISTERS

The Women Who Are My Forever Team of Teachers and Friends

In my small-town high school, I wasn't just Michael; I was "another one of the Packards." I proudly wore that name because of my older sisters, Rebecca, Priscilla, and Elizabeth. They were incredibly well-liked, and had established a good name for our family. I also have two younger sisters, Esther and Sabrina. I was lucky to grow up with so many sisters. They took care of me, taught me, and maintained a close relationship through the years.

August 3rd was National Sisters Day, and I have a lot to be grateful for. In a family my size, older siblings teach and raise the younger ones, so I was mothered a lot by my sisters. When my mom passed away, Elizabeth stepped into that role. It wasn't really fair for her as an 18-year-old to take on that responsibility, but she did it anyway. She drove us around, and she'd help me see the error of my ways (even if I wasn't always appreciative in the moment).

At different times as a teenager, I even worked for my older sisters. They made it seem like they hired me for important jobs (like the "Talent Show Assistant Sound Director" and the "Mail Room Envelope-Stuffer"). In reality, they hired me because I needed a job, and this was just one of the many ways they cared for me.



They really stepped in for my mom. I'd call Rebecca when I needed help with a headache or stomach bug, I'd talk to Priscilla about my college and career plans, and I'd ask Elizabeth for social advice. (All of them gave me relationship advice!)

When the older girls went off to college, I stepped up as big brother to my younger sisters, Esther and Sabrina. I was half tormentor and half hero — the guy who teased them until they cried but picked them up when they fell. Like my older sisters did for me, I had to teach them what I had learned from my mom. Things like integrity, how to be responsible, and handling social situations. Esther and I were in high school together and shared friends, so it was easier to teach her these things. Sabrina, on the other hand, is four years younger than me (we were never in school together), so we bonded differently.

A few years later, the timing worked out so that Esther, Sabrina, and I all went to college together. The three of us even lived in the same apartment complex! I was surprised at how grateful I was to have that experience together. They were outgoing, and I could piggyback off their social connections (and they could benefit from mine). I made sure they studied and passed their classes, and they ensured I dressed well and was a gentleman to the ladies...

When my brother Samuel and I moved to San Antonio and started the law firm, Esther and Sabrina (and their families) followed. For most of the time we've been here, the four of us have lived within just a mile or two of each other. We hang out often, and even the in-laws are all great friends, which is such a blessing. Our little kids play together. Our teenagers cause trouble together. And our oldest kids are just starting to go off to college together. It's great!

Through it all, my sisters have been my friends, second moms, and forever support system. To my sisters — wonderful women who always bring wisdom, love, support and a lot of fun into my life — I'm beyond thankful for you!

—Michael Packard

FRONTIER INGENUITY AT ITS FINEST

How 1800s Pioneers Turned Tree Stumps Into Cozy Homes

Imagine wandering through a dense, misty forest when you spot a cozy little home carved into the base of a towering tree stump. It sounds like something straight out of a fairytale, but in the rugged 1800s, it was everyday reality for some of America's earliest settlers on the West Coast.

Back then, before the lumber industry toppled millions of ancient giants, the forests were filled with trees so massive their trunks could measure 20 feet across or more. Once felled (a task so intense it could take a month), these colossal stumps were too big, stubborn, and abundant to remove easily. Rather than blowing them up (though some tried with dynamite), the pioneers did what pioneers do best: *They got scrappy*. They turned the stumps into homes, post offices, barns, and even dance floors!

One of the most legendary stump homes was the Lennstrom Stump House in Edgcomb, Washington. Crafted from a cedar stump 22 feet wide, it sheltered three adults and three children, proving that creativity could turn leftover lumber into a home. Though the original Lennstrom house met its end in 1946, you can still marvel at an 18-foot stump house today at the Stillaguamish Valley Pioneer Museum nearby.

But stump houses weren't just for surviving; they were for celebrating, too. In Calaveras, California, settlers turned a massive hollowed-out tree into a grand dance hall and hotel. Guests waltzed under twinkling candlelight and cedar boughs strung high above the forest floor. As one 1850s newspaper gushed, it was "romantic and beautiful beyond description" (*although the ladies did wish the stump-turned-dance floor had a little more bounce*)!

In a time when luxury was a warm fire and a sturdy roof (or stump) over your head, these quirky homes captured the best of pioneer spirit: grit, resourcefulness, and a little bit of magic.

Next time you pass an ancient stump on a hike, imagine what stories it might hold. In the right hands and with a bit of imagination, it might have been the coziest home on the frontier!



Humankind Is Kinder Than You Think

WHAT IF WE'RE WIRED FOR COMPASSION, NOT CRUELTY?

Humans are a lot kinder than you think. Yet, most of us have seen studies and books that promote the idea that human nature is inherently bad. It turns out that many of those studies were rigged, news reports sometimes used bad data, and some of those stories were just interesting fiction. Be Kind to Humankind Week takes place August 25-31, and it's an excellent opportunity to explore the giving nature of human beings.

The Stanford Prison Experiment was an influential study in which one group of people portrayed inmates and another their prison guards. It didn't take long before those with power oppressed those without, or so it seemed. It came out later that the researchers had to really push to find the right people to be bullies. Early results from the study found that the "guards" and "inmates" got along and played cards together. The researchers coached the "guards" to turn to brutality. Similarly, the famous novel "Lord of the Flies" leads us to believe that young boys shipwrecked on an island would turn savage against each other to survive. There was, however, a real-world instance of this scenario. The boys actually cooperated quite well ensuring everyone's survival.

Bad things happen in the world, but there's far more news coverage of those things than of the truth of human kindness. As a lawyer, kindness gets you further in your cases and in life. There are simple things people do regularly to help others. I like carrying \$1 bills and water bottles to hand out to people experiencing homelessness. It's easy for me to do if I'm at the stoplight already, and it gives me a chance to practice being kind to somebody without judging.

You are rewarded for kindness, emotionally and spiritually. You reap what you sow; when you plant seeds of generosity and care, they return to you. It can be as simple as smiling at someone, opening the door, wishing someone "good morning," or letting someone go ahead of you in line. If we can all live with the mantra, "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle," it makes the world that much better for all of us. And, more people are living by that code than it may seem.

—Michael Packard

Denied Social Security Disability Benefits?



Receiving a denial letter after applying for Social Security Disability benefits can be discouraging, but it's not the end of the road. In reality, most claims are denied initially, and many successful applicants win their benefits through the appeals process. If you find yourself in this situation, knowing what to do next is essential. Whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) made this decision due to the medical evidence, technical

Smart Steps to Strengthen Your Appeal

issues, or missing documentation, you can take practical steps to challenge a denial.

Understand the why behind denial.

If you have been denied, you will receive a letter explaining why they made the decision. It's essential to review the information thoroughly. Several reasons commonly come up. The SSA may believe you have not provided enough medical documentation to prove your disability or failed to follow medical instructions, like taking prescribed medication. You may also not meet the income requirements, or you may be simply missing information or have errors in your application. Figuring out why they denied your claim can help you determine what steps to take next.

Make your case again.

There is a full appeals process where you can fight for your benefits. The first avenue is a reconsideration where a new person will review your case with fresh eyes. If that doesn't result in approval, you can request a hearing with an Administrative

Law Judge who will evaluate any additional evidence or documentation you can provide to prove why you deserve benefits. Even if you still don't have a positive outcome, you can request a review by the SSA Appeals Council and even file a lawsuit in a federal court as a last resort. After your denial letter, you only have 60 days to formally request a reconsideration, so acting quickly is key.

Build a stronger case.

To strengthen your appeal, ensure your medical records are thorough, gather statements from your health care providers, and show you have followed your doctor's recommendations and treatments to manage your condition. A skilled attorney can help you build a strong case, represent you, and walk you through the complexities of the process.

If your Social Security Disability claim has been denied, don't give up. Packard Law Firm can help you get the benefits you deserve. Contact us today.

TAKE A BREAK



Beer	Mustard	Twins
Family	Peridot	Vacation
Leo	Poppy	Watermelon
Lunchbox	Sisters	Zucchini



Barbecue Chicken French Bread Pizza

Inspired by FromValeriesKitchen.com

Ingredients

- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into bite-size pieces
- 1 tsp Lawry's Seasoned Salt
- Fresh ground pepper, to taste
- 1/4 cup plus 3 tbsp barbecue sauce, divided
- 1/2 cup marinara sauce
- 1 loaf French bread
- 1/2 cup thinly sliced red onion
- 8 oz fresh mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 2 tbsp chopped cilantro

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 425 F. Line baking sheet with foil.
2. In a large skillet, heat vegetable oil over medium-high heat. Sauté chicken with seasoned salt and pepper.
3. Reduce heat to medium and add 3 tbsp barbecue sauce. Simmer for 3-4 minutes, remove skillet from heat, and set aside.
4. In a small bowl, combine remaining barbecue sauce and marinara sauce.
5. Cut French bread in half and place on prepared baking sheet. Coat with the sauce mixture, top with chicken and red onions, then add shredded cheeses.
6. Bake for 10-12 minutes, or until cheese is melted.
7. Remove from oven and top with chopped cilantro. Allow to sit for about 5 minutes before serving!

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1. Still the Little Brother, Always the Lucky One
2. The Wild History of the Wild West's Stump Houses
Good People Surround You
3. Build a Stronger Case
Barbecue Chicken French Bread Pizza
4. The Natural Way to Fight Off Summer Bugs (No Harsh Sprays Needed!)

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NATURE VS. NATURE

How to Use Plants and Scents to Repel Insects

There's nothing quite like summer. Backyard barbecues, evening hikes, and late-night stargazing. All of it is magical — until bugs crash the party. Mosquitoes, gnats, and ticks don't need an invite, and before you know it, you're scratching your ankles and swatting at the air. But you don't have to douse yourself in strong sprays and chemicals to keep them away. Here are five natural ways to repel bugs this summer — no chemicals required.

Choose Loose Clothing

Believe it or not, your outfit can make a big difference. Light-colored, loose-fitting clothing is less attractive to mosquitoes and helps prevent them from biting through fabric. Covering up exposed skin is one of the easiest ways to protect yourself. It's specifically helpful to wear long sleeves and pants at dusk and dawn, when bugs are most active.

Use Natural Aromas

Many bugs have super-sensitive noses, and certain scents repel them. Essential oils like citronella, eucalyptus, lavender, peppermint, and lemongrass are natural bug repellents. You can make your own spray by mixing a few drops of any of these scents with water and a carrier oil (like witch hazel or coconut oil), then spritzing it on your skin or clothes. Just make sure you're cautious with essential oils around pets and kids.

Smoke Them Out

Burning herbs like sage or rosemary in your campfire or fire pit not only smells amazing but also helps keep mosquitoes and gnats at bay. Bugs hate the smoke from these plants, and it's an easy, low-effort way to keep them off your picnic table.

Watch Your Scents

Surprisingly, it's not just about what repels bugs — it's also about avoiding what attracts them. Fragranced lotions, perfumes, and even certain soaps can lure bugs to you. In summer, it's smart to go unscented when heading outdoors.

Keep Your Space Clean

If you have standing water on your property, it's a mosquito's favorite breeding ground. Make sure you dump water from flower pots, birdbaths, or kiddie pools regularly. And if you're entertaining outside, clean up food scraps and trash — flies and ants will sniff that out fast.

