

RANDOM SAMPLES

BALANCED LIFE: OHIO NATIVE IS IN RECORD BOOK

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Not everyone would consider balancing a stack of six bottles on his index finger for five seconds the culmination of a lifelong dream. Tiffin native Brad Funkhouser does, though, and for that I envy him.

His feat took place on Super Bowl Sunday and was confirmed with a certificate from Guinness World Records earlier this month, but it started much earlier.

"I'd always wanted to be in the [Guinness World Records book] growing up," the 41-year-old explained. "I was pretty serious about it too."

When he was 7 or 8, Brad had a collection of hundreds of business cards and wrote about it to the authority on record-breaking achievement. Too bad Guinness wrote back to tell him the existing record was something like 20,000, he says.



Later in junior high, the local mall was going to sponsor a day inviting people to try to break world records. Brad decided to go for the longest time standing on one leg — some 32 or 33 hours straight at the time, by his recollection. Too bad the event was canceled.

"So that dream went down the drain," he said. "Then we grow up."

Brad went on to receive degrees from Bowling Green State University and the University of Toledo, and now the father of two living in Jackson, Mich., is marketing director for an engineering firm. His youthful, record-setting dreams slipped from his consciousness and may never have returned if the subject hadn't come up in a conversation with the Boy Scouts he works with as an assistant Scout master.

He decided to check out the Guinness World Records Web site. There you can learn that Anthony Victor, of India, set a record with ear hair that measures longer than 7 inches, and that Jackie Bibby, of Texas, once sat in a bathtub for 45 minutes with 87 rattlesnakes. If they could become immortals, why not Brad?

So, repeating the process he'd begun many years before, Brad wrote to Guinness, this time to see if it would be interested in him balancing pop cans on his finger. Ever since he was small, Brad displayed a knack for balancing things — chairs, tools, knives, swords, even a piece of paper with a slight crease in it.

Guinness gets more than 50,000 inquiries every year from people who want to break records, and the people there weren't particularly keen on his pop can idea. But half-liter bottles? That's another story, they told him.

"I e-mailed back: 'What is the record?' and they said there is none."

Brad jumped at the opportunity and organized an event at Jackson Catholic Middle School that would make his attempt into something fun for the whole community. He also convinced Meijer to donate bottles of fitness water for him to use, along with \$500 for his Boy Scouts troop and a local charity.

Then he got down to business in front of a crowd of about 60, starting by balancing four bottles on his right index finger. Then five. Then — close to 20 attempts and 1½ hours after the event began — he finally got six to stay stacked for more than five seconds. He tried for seven but eventually decided it wasn't worth everyone's time.

Maybe you're reading this and thinking: Six? I can do more than that.

Brad thinks he can too — he's done it before in his kitchen — but that's not the point. What was important to him was doing something fun that others in the community could enjoy. And, on another level, he was completing unfinished business.

Maybe he didn't hug a million people, grow his fingernails to freakish lengths, or set some other impossible record, but he still has a lot to be proud of in my book. He made a childhood dream come true, and how many of us can say that?

As for the actual record, have at it. It's already served its purpose from his perspective.

"If you can do seven," he says, "the record is yours, my friend."

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