

# Not All Supermen But All For The Kids

Throwing the term "biggest event of the year" around in the penn state community usually yields nothing but a one word response... "Thon." In some circles, Thon is bigger than the Olympics, the NBA All-Stars, and the Brigantine 17 and under tennis round-robin tournament all rolled into one. This, I think, is what caught my attention. Could there be anything to righteously justify a stadium filled with party-crazed madmen bent upon pushing these dancers past their limits? Or what of the dancers themselves, could they not inherently be accused of some type of peculiar masochism? It all seemed Greek to me, which was funny given Thon's history. But what did it all mean? That's what I was sent to find out.

Given Thon's long history, and undeniable preexisting prestige, I felt it necessary to handle this event with a certain degree of professionalism and respect; which is why I felt it best to emulate the dancer's hardships with something reasonably commensurate, a subzero camping trip to the summit of nearby Mount Rothrock. Accompanied by Lion's Eye's own Gerald Mark Dungan as my photographer, I set out on this painstaking yet enlightening endeavor.

Arriving in the evening, I found myself right on schedule for the event. Following a post-dusk tent-pitching endeavor, I armed myself with a press pass, pens, tape recorders, and a notepad before heading onto the floor to enter the fray. My initial reaction was that I arrived at some sort of twisted aerobics match as hundreds of Penn State fanatics bounced like automatons on command to the flashing dual screens on-stage in front of them. A song ensued and lyrics immediately embedded themselves to memory - "What are you gonna do with all that cash, with all cash, in all those cans? Dance all night!!"

I proceeded with my inquiry into the heart of the matter... interviewing George Kapterian, Penn State York's Thon Chair and dancer. "I think it [lasting all of the 48 grueling hours] will be hard, but I can make it," he replied optimistically. Similar was the response of Frank Joseph Friday, "It's been a lot of fun so far and I think I'm going to do pretty good." As I continued to navigate the massive recreation hall, I couldn't help but feel as if I'd reached the pot of gold at the end of a Skittles rainbow. Dancers flamboyantly dressed in every hue of every shade imaginable surrounded me. Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, they ambitiously continued to dance on.

With the same level of vigor, Gerald Mark Dungan and I eagerly receded to our campsite. Taking note of the below 20 degree weather, we suited up wearing many layers of shirts and jackets. Our first and foremost issue of business commenced - FOOD. We feasted upon a delicacy of Worcester marinated steaks and jalapeño potato chips. As the evening persisted, the cold slowly began to take hold. We found ourselves fiddling with axes, knives, and branches, scrambling to piece

together a fire. After about an hour of nursing a lost cause, our efforts were forced to succumb to the heavy winds of the mountain.

The tent provided much needed coverage from the icy gales. Yet our hasty tent-pitching resulted in us overlooking tying down the sides of the tent's fly, this in turn caused it to grate eerily and unnervingly throughout much of the night.

We returned to Thon at the kickoff of hour 15, unbeknownst to the dancers of course. This time, I moved to the bleachers in hopes of discovering a different perspective. There, I witnessed a much more tiring view, as I felt as if I was staring through a two-way mirror at a stadium-sized frat party. Out in the distance, I was able to discern a battalion of Thon helpers wearing chicken hats charged with infiltrating the dancers' ranks and collecting half-eaten plates of food and discarded wrappers. I realized then that I much preferred the intoxicating scene that was the gymnasium floor.

Following up on my interviews, the dancers' weariness became increasingly apparent. The once cheery Frank Joseph Friday now commented, "My legs hurt, but other than that I guess I'm OK." SGA President, Stacie Mann, was experiencing the brunt of the wear as she was reported missing for a short while due to feeling ill. Dancers only furthered the depths of their own masochism by trying to determine the time elapsed. When asked why they would want to do something like that, Thon Co-Chair, Matthew Kelly replied profoundly, "They wouldn't." Kelly continued to express the importance of support for the dancers by explaining that he'd been there nearly 24 hours without sleep; holding up a red water pistol with a look of madness he exclaimed, "In order to stay awake, I had to shoot water into my eyes because they were drying out and all the dancers told me to go home because I looked tired."

In order to combat the slowly waning dancers, wave after wave of moralers were sent in to keep their spirits up. Supplying the dancers with dollar-store games and party paraphernalia, each set of moralers appeared more ruthless than the one prior. Thon veteran, Sean Nichols, described their relationship as reciprocal, saying they feed off of one another. I couldn't agree more. With the passing of each hour, catastrophe seemed more and more inevitable, yet this only sparked greater passion in the moralers. Somehow, this dysfunctional cycle fueled the dancers long enough to keep going. Just maybe that was the kind of drive and encouragement they needed to make it.

After our countless observations, we left for Green Bowl to reconnoiter with some of our Delaware County brethren before restocking on food and other necessities for our roughest misadventure of the weekend. The forecast for State College was 9 degrees, the winds high, and we knew the mountain would be a factor.

Headstrong and determined, we arrived back at the campsite, this

time with a drum of camp oil to start our fire. The temperature was dropping rapidly as it was 4 degrees at the base of the mountain in the nearby city. We then came upon the epiphany that we had found ourselves deep in our own self-destructive cycle. Keeping us warm for some time was the campfire, although again, it was ultimately dissolved by the immutably blustery gusts of wind, which somehow were able to penetrate all 17 layers of clothing I was wearing. Luckily, Gerald Mark Dungan and I found solace in our tents with our equally extensive collection of bedding.

With the alarm sounding at 2:45a.m., we awoke to find an inch thick of frost surrounding our sheets and sleeping bags. Sluggishly, we stirred about the tent, taking about an hour to finally muster the energy to leave. We returned to Thon at 4:00a.m. There, we discovered the dancers to be experiencing the same temperament. Over the course of the next few hours, I began to understand that these people were all just everyday Penn State students, not supermen; and they were hurting. The lively carnivalistic ambiance had shifted steadily to a slow-paced struggle. The liveliest of the dancers found themselves playing catch with balloons from the stands, or filling out crossword puzzles. Others too tired to stand were being supported on the backs of moralers, or recumbent in the hidden rooms receiving massages and in some cases medical attention.

In an attempt to make a difference, I tried talking and forming hacky sack circles with random people who appeared to be giving in. That was the point of this all, wasn't it? Making a difference. Over 700 dancers all gathered here for one purpose, to raise money for kids with cancer. They deserved to make it, but no one said it would be easy. Crystal Bowhall, SGA Vice-President and first year dancer, said "It's a lot harder than I thought... I'm not sure if I'll do this next year but I definitely want to help out somehow." Frank Joseph Friday, who mentioned neck, back, and leg pain, said "You think about it and think 'Oh I can stand,' but standing 48 hours really does a number on you."

Towards the final hours of Thon, I noticed something remarkable. The stands were beginning to overflow with supporters, the hall was alive with commotion, and in under an hour, the dancers made their final stand. Even those who once seemed hopeless were brought alive a little longer with a determination to persevere vicariously through the audience. My memory shifted to those long cold hours over the past two nights when we found ourselves out in the wilderness. People called us crazy for what we did, and maybe we were; but it was the determination and drive to accomplish something that made it all happen. For those last few moments, I knew the dancers felt like Gerry and I did when we woke up looking over the hills from the peak of that mountain - on top of the world.

by Dr. Andrew Walter D.D.

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## Thon Photo Collage

Composed by Lion's Eye Staff



## Infinitely For The Kids

Lion's Eye Featured Columnist:  
Thon Co-Chairperson  
Matthew James Kelly

In the modern cult classic novel "Perks of Being a Wallflower" the main character, Charlie, utters the words "and in that moment we were infinite." I don't think there are any better words to describe what it's like to witness THON.

As we drew towards the final 4 hours every person in that room became infinite.

All around was imagery that was beyond words. A little kid sitting on the shoulders of a dancer squirting a water gun, another kid running around on the stage dancing around to "Who Let the Dogs Out," 700 very tired people pushing their body limitations to last just 240 more minutes for the kids.

Songs that you've heard thousands of times over take on whole new meanings. You've never truly understood the song "Living on a Prayer" until you see thousands of tired college students screaming the lyrics at the top of their lungs; "Take my hand, we'll make it I swear... Livin' on a prayer!"

Perhaps that particular song takes on a new meaning because those 700 college kids on the dance floor are living out those children's prayers.

You'll never hear "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" the same way after you see an entire room locked arm in

arm swaying and singing along. The lyrics "I see children play, I watch them grow, they'll learn much more than I'll ever know," in Louie Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World" have never sounded so prophetic.

It's been said so many times that it's practically cliché now but, you have to experience THON to really understand what I'm saying.

The Energy, The Music, The Family, the Friendship. It's all there waiting inside the walls.

You need to see the whole room doing the line dance, you need to hear the whole crowd singing along with every song a band plays, you need to feel the sweat of thousands of other supporters around you. There's nothing better in the world than those things.

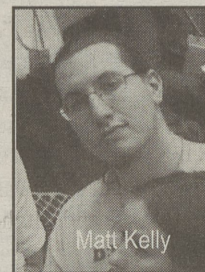
To kick off THON they played a series of movie moments that were suppose make people think of what they were about to endure as a form of motivation. One was from the 1993 movie Sandlot: "Let me tell you something

kid: Everybody gets one chance to do something great. Most people never take the chance, either because they're too scared, or they don't recognize it when it spits on their shoes."

Even if you don't think you're ever going to dance at THON, do something great and go attend it or get involved with it here at Delco.

Live out a child's Prayer and be Infinite.

To *Infinitely Live Out Your Thon Experience*



Matt Kelly