

Worth a Thousand Words

By Reg P. Wydeven

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When we were in high school, my buddies and I were known to play a few practical jokes on each other. One of the best was actually played by my friend Lee's dad. When one of the guys was in their basement restroom, Big Lee opened the door and snapped a few photographs of him on the throne.

After the pictures were developed, we all got some great laughs out of them. Of course, the photos were turned over to the victim so he could destroy them. Always the procrastinator, our friend instead just threw them on his dresser. Needless to say, his mother found them, was reduced to tears and chewed him out. She actually said that those pictures may cost him the chance to be elected President of the United States.

Thankfully, those were the days before the Internet (not that anyone would have ever downloaded those pictures anyway). However, in today's world, any risqué photo may make its way onto the World Wide Web, especially if it is of a famous person.

Pictures of Britney Spears, Paris Hilton and other celebrities getting out of cars with short skirts and no underwear on were up on the Internet faster than my friend's mom ripped up his potty pictures. Because those photos were taken in public where the celebrities had no expectation of privacy, the photographers had the legal rights to the pictures and could post them.

A few weeks ago, I wrote about Erin Andrews, the ESPN reporter who was unknowingly videotaped in her hotel room getting dressed. Depending on which state she was in, there may be laws in place that made it illegal to take the video, as Andrews was in a private room where she had an expectation of privacy. Accordingly, Andrews' attorneys warned any website hosting the video that they would be sued.

Much like the underwear-less phase, young celebrities' new disturbing trend is taking nude photographs of themselves and sending them to their boyfriends. Shockingly, these photos don't always remain private and show up on the web.

In the last two weeks, nude photos were posted on the Internet of Ashley Greene, who portrays Alice Cullen in the "Twilight" films, and Vanessa Hudgens of Disney's "High School Musical" fame. This is the second set of nude photos of Hudgens posted on the web, with the first debuting in 2007.

Most websites quickly removed the Hudgens photos from 2007 because she was purportedly a minor at the time the photos were taken, so the hosts feared child pornography charges. Likewise, Hudgens' attorneys are claiming this new batch was taken around the same time as the first, so these shots are illegal to post as well.

Additionally, attorneys for both Hudgens and Greene are informing websites that it is unlawful to post the pictures because the girls photographed themselves, therefore, they own the copyright to the photos. This means the photographer "owns the exclusive rights, among others, to reproduce, distribute, and to display the photos."

Further, it is illegal to use someone's likeness for commercial purposes without their permission. Since many of the websites that post these pictures have paid advertisers, they can be sued for their ad revenues.

Many people look down on the Amish, claiming they have a "primitive" way of life. One of the things they believe is that being photographed robs someone of their soul. Perhaps they aren't so primitive after all.

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