

Carolyn Wiley
 DEVIL'S HEAD DIARY

Coping with Dragons

Years ago, I bought a small, exquisite piece of framed calligraphy that now hangs in my laundry room, where it speaks a simple truth:

*There have been no dragons in my life,
Only small spiders and stepping in gum...
I could have coped with dragons.*

Except for the surprise factor, small spiders are inconsequential and I've usually avoided gum on the bottom of my shoe.

Pantyhose, however, have been a near constant threat.

Pantyhose were a boon to the women of the 1960s, replacing the sadistic demands of the longline girdle, garter belt and scads of unmatched stockings. But improper implementation of pantyhose can inflict severe reputation scarring when combined with wide-leg bell-bottom pants.

Beware, for that fiendish fashion combination is reemerging from its long banishment to the infernal regions, where it belongs.

While undergoing an otherwise innocent new-neighbor coffee-klatch interrogation one day, I let it slip that I could play bridge. An invitation was extended to spend an afternoon assessing the variable combos of 13 and wagering on the probable alignment based upon the indispensably cryptic verbal cues.

A dabbling artist, I finished up a print-making session, doffed my inky duds by the washer, dug through the dryer, and was out the door—coiffed, bejeweled and chic in my best bell-bottoms—on my way to the first of what I assumed would be many neighborly bridge games.

Eventually, I lucked into a dummy hand and got to examine our inspired hostess-created spread. I collected a dainty plate of goodies and was on my way back to the card table when the heel of my shoe caught on something. Looking down, I saw a stocking foot dragging behind me. I stooped to grab the footie and stash it in my pocket.

But when I pulled on the foot, the other leg of my bell-bottoms was yanked up like a puffy Austrian shade. It wasn't a footie, but a pair of pantyhose snaking up one leg and down the other. Subtlety was lost, and I was reduced to snorting giggles as I rolled up the resistant wad of nylon. Both pant legs were riding thigh-high before the effect of static cling was overcome.

Curiously, no further bridge invitations were extended and my favorite bell-bottoms eventually aged out and were relegated to pre-rag-bag grunge wear.

Soon after, while dashing in one Sunday following a morning devoted to the moral instruction of small people, I doffed the church togs without removing the pantyhose and donned my favorite grunge wear. I was eager to resume laying tile in our unfinished basement.

I was well into the job when the phone rang. Expecting a call from my mother, I ran to answer the phone by the patio door. While talking, I stepped outside and assumed a relaxed, one-legged stork stance, leaning against the door jamb and balancing the other foot on my knee.

As I moved to hang up, I realized that the foot of the pantyhose was glued to the pants leg. The wide-leg bell-bottoms added to the instability of that first step as I flung myself away from the wall. There was considerable flailing and cursing during my staggering rush across the patio. No injuries, but I did moon the entire neighborhood.

In retrospect, maybe my treasured calligraphy should read:

*There have been no dragons in my life
Only bell-bottoms and glue on the foot of my
pantyhose.
I could have coped with dragons.*

Carolyn Wiley copes with the changing fashions of life from Longbranch.

Rob Vajko

KEY THOUGHTS


Caring and Cared For

I will be 59 in May. My mother gave birth to my brother when she was 20 years old, and to me when she was 22. My two sisters followed shortly after that. My mother spent her 20s and 30s getting us dressed, wiping our noses and our tears, getting us breakfast, lunch and dinner, and making sure we got dressed, brushed our teeth and took baths.

My mother is now 80 and it's time for my dad and the four of us, her children, to do those things for her now. Mum (she's British, so it's Mum, not Mom) has Alzheimer's and a slew of other health problems that means she can't do any of those tasks for herself. Most of the time she doesn't even seem to care if we do them for her or not. But we continue to do them so when her time comes she will have lived to the end with dignity.

Caring for aging parents, especially when they reach a point where they can no longer care for themselves, is a difficult, often daunting challenge that many of you have faced or are dealing with as well.

Distance often makes matters even more complicated, especially emotionally. My parents live in Bloomington, Indiana, so I can't just pop in to see them whenever I wish. In this increasingly mobile society, that is becoming the norm rather than the exception. It is difficult not to feel guilty for abandoning them in their time of need. Oftentimes the brunt of the burden of caring for ailing parents falls on one or the other of the siblings; in my case, it's my sister who lives only 15 minutes away, and that can add even more to the feeling of guilt ("I should be doing more to help my sister!").

On top of that, dealing with aging parents can be tricky, even if they are still able to function on their own. A recent study from Penn State University found that 77 percent of adult children labelled their parents as "stubborn." We tend to resist change more and more the older we get and elderly parents can be pretty set in their ways and resistant to change of any kind, even change that would improve their quality of life.

Here are a few tips that I have discovered through this recent challenge:

I can only do what I can do. This might sound obvious but when you are beating yourself up for not doing more you might need to repeat this mantra to yourself over and over again.

Keep your sense of humor. One of the best compliments I got during my visit to Mum recently was from my sister who told me, "Mum hasn't laughed like that in a long time." We can laugh or cry, so we try to laugh.

Remember who they are and what they've been through. There is a tendency with elderly parents to think of them as stubborn children. They aren't—they are adults who've experienced a whole lot in their lives. Honor that life.

Try to put yourself in their shoes. As frustrated as you are, chances are they are even more frustrated and distraught. How will you feel when you lose your independence and mobility?

Accept the situation. It might not be what you or they want but if there is no alternative then there is no alternative. Accepting this is crucial for everyone's well-being.

Rob Vajko lives in Gig Harbor.

Curt Scott
 THE LONG VIEW

Just BAM It

Disasters obey Murphy's Law: "Bad things will happen at the worst possible time." That means you must be ready all the time. How do you do that?

Break "all" into manageable chunks and then think, plan and prepare while maintaining a positive mental attitude.

Your car is a good place to start. Most of us spend hours each day driving to and from work, school, play, athletics, or visiting friends and relatives. Therefore, that vehicle becomes a critical storage site for minimum essential survival items—the BAM list.

BAM is the BARe Minimum you need in your car from now on.

Here's why. The greatest natural disaster in the history of the United States—the next Pacific Northwest Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake (the CSZ Big One)—could happen at any time. Seismic experts predict a very powerful, very destructive CSZ Big One—Richter scale 8.0 or higher—will happen. They just don't know when. The destruction to surface infrastructure (roads, bridges, rail, seaports) will be catastrophic. If you're in your car at that moment, what you put in your car can save your life.

The last CSZ Big One happened at 9 a.m. Jan. 26, 1700. The best guesstimate for the CSZ quake's reoccurrence is 300 to 500 years. In other words, we're due. (Note: Seismic experts have varying opinions about CSZ frequency; 300 to 500 years comes from 20 of the largest CSZ quakes over the past 10,000 years.)

The five BAM list items are water, tarp, shovel, warmth and light. With these five items, you will be able to face a very difficult survival experience. The CSZ Big One will shock your world. The BAM items will blunt some of that mental trauma and shift your focus from your plight today to surviving until tomorrow.

Water is critical. Lack of water is a killer. At least one gallon of water for each person per day is a good minimum. A tarp prevents exposure to wind, rain and cold. A shovel is useful as a means of making shelter, making visual "help" signals, finding food, and for defense. You also need something for warmth—a coat, a blanket, a sleeping bag—to retain core body temperature because body heat loss is another killer.

Carolyn Wiley
DEVIL'S HEAD DIARY



The Theory of Corpulent Polarity

To my knowledge, scientific inquiry into the topic of Corpulent Polarity is limited. My serious research began in the early 1980s, when it dawned on me that my weight was becoming exceedingly easy to observe, and my tennis game was affected. When moved vertically to return a high lob, my skeletal form would perform as usual but there was a delay in lift-off for the soft tissue.

Initially, diet and exercise seemed the way to go but when that produced disappointing results, I expanded my quest and remembered that matter—the physical substance of our world—exists. Matter can be altered but matter can neither be created nor destroyed. Hence, when a person loses weight, it is not really lost. Obviously, this unjust law of physics was affecting me.

Was it some form of magnetic force upon “lost” matter that mattered? This had to be an environmental problem affecting the atmosphere.

In my youth “bean-pole” and “rail”—as in “skinny as a”—were used to describe my less-than-Rubenesque physique. Weight had never been of concern to me. In a moment of contemplation, I realized that several neighbors had joined a weight loss program. They had “lost” the equivalent of an entire person. I had gained approximately one-third of that person.

What was acting on the “lost” matter?

After all, when you consider the effect of the moon’s gravitational pull on the liquid matter that constitutes the world’s oceans, it would seem reasonable that its first cousin, magnetism, would affect matter released into the atmosphere. Magnetism, like electricity, is magical—invisibly moving things through space and holding objects in suspension. It is a silent, powerful energy that is primarily known through observable effects of attracting and repelling forces.

For the less scholarly inclined, interest in magnetism dwindles as a passionate truth-seeking endeavor once one has tired of those magnetic draw-a-face toys of childhood.

But I was on the verge of a breakthrough. Something about the group of neighbors had caused a negative polarity that sent blasts of matter into the atmosphere. As a sole human unit, wandering through the neighborhood, I obviously had developed

a positive polarity. Polarity had to be the controlling factor in the redistribution of matter, and for that matter, corpulence.

That would explain why exercise, diet and fasting often have no effect in reversing mid-section expansion. The success or failure that a dieter experiences is not a matter of “will power,” as we have been fraudulently led to believe, it is a matter of corpulent polarity.

If you are lucky enough to be in negative polarity the weight will seemingly melt away. If you are in a positive polarity you are doomed to not just hold your own weight in stasis but also attract and retain the weight “lost” by others.

Further data is being analyzed to identify the exacerbating effects of electronic devices, rain, synthetic fibers and puffy vests upon one’s corpulent polarity. I am even now devising a mobile app for my smart phone to temporarily reverse my own positive polarity and instantly transfer excess matter onto those negatively polarized persons in the vicinity, but so far the effect has been temporary. Should my experiments succeed, however, those closest to me will be the first to know it.

Carolyn Wiley conducts her research in Longbranch.

Rob Vajko
KEY THOUGHTS



Lessons I'm Learning from Silas

Last fall my wife and I were approached by a good friend of ours who has a developmentally delayed (we shall henceforth refer to this as DD) son of 23. His name is Silas. His mother, Katherine, asked if we would consider hosting a house where he and two other DD young men would live semi-independent lives. Silas is highly functional. He takes the bus by himself, he has a part-time job at the YMCA and is generally pretty self-reliant. He just needs an occasional “guiding hand” in certain areas. After a lot of thought, discussion and prayer, Jody and I agreed to host and moved into a house in uptown Gig Harbor.

For now, Silas is the only resident. As soon as we find two other residents who fit in well and want to be here with us, our little “family” will grow and we will do life together. Silas moved in part-time with us in February and full-time in March.

Silas has taught us much in the short time we’ve lived together. Here are three things that I’ve learned from Silas.

Singing is really good for you. Silas does nothing halfway. He either could not care less about something or, if he does like

something, he’s all in. This is especially true of singing. When Silas sings, he gives it his all and he can often be heard downstairs (our living area is upstairs and the residents living area is downstairs) singing at the top of his lungs. He’s no Pavarotti but that doesn’t stop him; he sings as if he were. My wife recently told him how much she enjoys hearing him sing and that it makes her happy. Silas smiled and said “It makes me happy too!” And that’s the point—singing as if no one is around does make you happy. I think we should all do like Silas and sing out loud more often.

Laughter is good medicine. Silas loves old sitcoms like “All in the Family,” “The Jeffersons,” and “Golden Girls.” He watches them on YouTube on his laptop and you know when because you can hear him laughing. Like his singing, when Silas laughs, he laughs wholeheartedly. And his laughing is infectious. Jody and I have often found ourselves giggling simply listening to him laugh.

Don’t just be a spectator, participate. Silas doesn’t just laugh at the sitcoms he watches; he interacts with the characters. It is not unusual to hear him yelling at the computer screen something like, “I can’t believe that you did that! That would be sooooo embarrassing!” At first, I thought it odd; after all, the characters in the shows he’s watching can’t hear him or answer back, how silly to act as if they could. It occurred to me, however, that I do exactly the same thing when I’m watching football. Russell Wilson may not be able to hear me but that doesn’t keep me from yelling at him to scramble or hurry up and throw the ball, and that makes the game much more fun to watch. I suspect Silas enjoys the shows he watches all the more because he “participates” instead of just watching them.

I am certain that future columns will cover some of the other lessons Silas is teaching me, but for now I’m realizing that our “responsible adult” way of handling life might just benefit from becoming a little more like Silas. It isn’t easy, but I’m learning to be open to what Silas can teach me and I think I’m going to be a little richer for it.

Rob Vajko lives in Gig Harbor.

Curt Scott
THE LONG VIEW



Drop, Cover, Hold

Because an earthquake could happen at any moment, a wise thing to know is what to do when that earthquake begins. Here are the first of nine steps that emergency management folks in the Pacific Northwest

recommend you learn and be ready to apply when you feel the shaking start.

When you enter any interior space from now on, your first duty to yourself and your loved ones is to decide if you will try to run outside or to remain in the room and find a place to get down, cover your head and hold onto until the shaking stops. Expect to be there for 30 to 45 seconds.

The question of whether to run outside or drop, cover and hold is, “Can I get outside in two seconds or less?” If not, use those precious two seconds to get under cover at the first sign of shaking.

Why the urgency? A strong earthquake (any earthquake above a 7.0 is strong enough), will toss things off shelves, table and counter tops with lots of force. You don’t want to be in the path of those objects. You need to get down fast and stay low as quickly as you can. The quicker the better.

Historical records show that a very strong earthquake of the 9.0 Richter scale variety—think megaquake—happens about every 300 to 500 years in our region. The Pacific Northwest Seismic Network, a group of scientists from a broad range of academic disciplines, discovered that the last great Cascadia Subduction Zone (CSZ) earthquake occurred at 9 a.m. Tuesday, January 26, 1700.

These scientists looked back into 10,000 years of Pacific Northwest geological history along the coasts of Washington, Oregon and even up to British Columbia and down to Northern California. Because the last 9.0 quake occurred when there were no highways, roads, railroads, seaports, airports or any other kind of modern conveyance system for goods and services, only the indigenous people living in the PNW at the time knew of it. Their oral history recorded a tremendous earthquake six or seven generations before explorers from the eastern U.S. and Canada first arrived here in the early 1800s.

There was another group of people who also took notice. A very large tsunami traveled across the Pacific Ocean and struck the Japanese eastern coast line with enough force to cause a lot of damage and a lot of deaths. What brought that tsunami to the attention of the Japanese, who have kept meticulous records for about 1,000 years, was the lack of a corresponding Japanese earthquake.

The PNW seismic scientists, some of whom had studied seismic activity in Japan, concluded that such a large earthquake here would have very likely created a large tsunami on the Japanese

Carolyn Wiley
DEVIL'S HEAD DIARY



The Mysterious William H. Brown

My paternal grandmother was tiny, about 94 pounds fully-clothed and dripping wet. I seriously doubt that anyone ever described her as a handsome woman. Think Granny Clampett — without the looks. She was stubborn, headstrong and as fierce as a banty hen. She did not cotton to socializing, church-going or idleness. Granny Clampett — without the charm.

As a child she had been regarded as sickly and frail, and she was. But she lived independently and managed her farm until her 96th year and only then did she begrudgingly accept assistance.

After her death, I happened upon additional information in an old leather-bound church record. The record runs from 1855 to 1871 and spans an interesting 16-year period in Missouri history.

The first six and a half pages are devoted to Minutes of Session. Seldom is more than one line of the leather-bound volume skipped between recorded notes. However, in 1859, the record becomes sporadic and less detailed. After the March 10, 1861 meeting, a half-page is left blank and the next entry, written by my great-grandfather begins at the top of the next page. It simply states: 1866, September 17.

"Now about this time a National difficulty occurred and the church became somewhat scattered and in a disorganized state."

The 19 words representing a five and a half year gap are a singular example of understatement and an insight into the way unpleasantness should be handled — unpleasantness doesn't warrant mention. (Unfortunately, dear readers, economy of phraseology and mention of unpleasantness is not a genetic trait.)

As an 8-year-old, I knew as much about my paternal grandfather, William H. Brown, as a casual reader would know about the Civil War from that cryptic entry in the New Mt. Pleasant Church registry.

Needless to say, there was unpleasantness associated with that shadowy character — W. H. Brown — because no one ever, ever, ever talked about him.

This was so ingrained in the family culture that I sensed that displays of overt curiosity might just lead to a fate similar to that of the proverbial cat.

However, little pitchers really do have big ears, and I reconstructed a biography based upon astute observations and a smattering of overheard conversations. The most significant occurred on a Texas-hot summer day. I was diligently minding my own business on the porch swing while my grandmother and a neighbor chatted nearby. My ears pricked up when the conversation veered to: "The day Mr. Brown died..."

The neighbor described a trip into town as a small boy where he had witnessed the very public death of my mysterious ancestor. He described blood on the red granite steps, and the agony of Mr. Brown in his death throes on the steps of the post office.

Since I could read, I knew that chiseled above the post office door were the letters B-A-N-K, and that does not spell "post office" in any language.

I had seen enough cowboy movies to surmise why tales about my dad's dad were taboo.

Intrigued, further little-pitcher-style investigation ensued and the mystery deepened as new facts were revealed.

The marriage had been forbidden and she had been disowned by her doting father.

Shortly after the marriage, her groom left Missouri and headed to Texas alone.

She followed but her journey was interrupted when my uncle was born in Oklahoma Territory.

Within a year after their reunion in Texas, she was pregnant again.

Her husband died before that baby — my daddy — was born.

It was an epic story. Headstrong but naive girl defies parents, flees, has a baby and another on the way when her beloved dies on the steps of the B-A-N-K. Woman faces down gossip and community condemnation, raises two children alone, manages a farm, and when her parents lose everything in a sketchy financial deal she takes them in and supports them in their dotage.

Wow! My fantasy "Woman-Undaunted" script wrote itself in my head. By the time I was 40, all that remained was figuring camera angles and selecting the cast.

Truth was revealed when my brother and I were sorting through the mementos of Grandmother's long life. Imagine my surprise and, yes, chagrin, to have my whole-cloth fabrication ripped asunder.

We learned that the Most Reverend William H. Brown had died when he went to deposit the Sunday collection. The move to Texas was in search of a drier climate, not an escape from the law. He was a victim of tuberculosis, not a shoot-out

or a vengeful bounty hunter.

My movie was never made and my whole family history had to be edited and re-worked. It was interesting to learn that my brother had constructed a different and slightly racier story about the star-crossed lovers — one that explains the dramatic differences in looks and stature between my Daddy and his older brother — but I remain scandalized for having been raised in a family without a family scandal.

Carolyn Wiley is an award-winning humor columnist who lives in Longbranch.

Richard Gelinas

EMPIRICALLY YOURS



Between Two Trees

Fir: Hey Cedar, have you heard anything lately from your cousins, the white and black spruce trees in Alaska? I'm getting worried that they are dying because of changes in the climate up there.

Cedar: Well they're your cousins too. All I heard is that because of successive years of warm temperatures along with much less rain and snow than usual, the beetle infestations that killed the cousins out on the Kenai Peninsula have now spread to Southcentral Alaska, around Anchorage. The trees are dead or dying on more than 1 million acres — bigger than the state of Rhode Island and nearly the size of Delaware. That's a lot of trees...just gone.

Fir: Sounds like the Alaskan spruce forests are becoming another casualty of a warming climate driven by greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, especially carbon dioxide.

Cedar: I rather like the higher carbon dioxide levels. It helps me grow faster, as I pull it in from the air and turn it into sugars, cellulose, and everything else that's me, using photosynthesis driven by sunlight.

Fir: Yeah, well your bark isn't loaded with beetle larvae yet, chewing their way into your cambium layer like they're doing to our cousins in Alaska. Considering how fast the climate changed and the trees are dying, there isn't time for the emergence of new spruce trees that can tolerate the warmth and lack of water and resist the beetles.

Cedar: Do you reckon that excess carbon dioxide in the air is the culprit?

Fir: Yes, carbon dioxide derived by the fact that Homo sapiens (H sap) continue to burn the bodies of extinct plants and animals for transportation, electricity

generation, and industrial processes such as making steel, cement, even fertilizer. All of this burning dumps tens of billions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year. This means that H sap's excessive use of fossilized carbon-rich material is changing everything.

Cedar: Wait ... they just dump this CO₂ into the atmosphere, without recycling it? Without any attempt to remove it? Long-range, this is scary. Given that CO₂ in the atmosphere traps heat, global warming is inevitable. It's a simple consequence of the physics of how CO₂ interacts with light.

Fir: I wonder why they don't simply use sunlight to make electricity and pull CO₂ out of the air, the way we do.

Cedar: There are two H sap companies that have a process to pull CO₂ from the air, not by photosynthesis, but by a reversible reaction with strong alkalis like sodium hydroxide. They call this direct air capture. The two companies, one in British Columbia and the other in Switzerland, have demonstrated that it works, quite well in fact. The problem is that there is no market for the huge amounts of CO₂ that need to be removed. But if the direct air capture of CO₂ is powered by renewable solar or wind electricity and then pumped into disposal wells drilled into rock such as basalt, it is chemically bonded to the rock and it stays there permanently. They call that carbon capture and storage or sequestration. A carbon tax could help pay for direct air capture and permanent burial, but that would take political action, which isn't likely. Some people are aware that climate change is having big effects on trees and animals but other H saps say it's all a hoax. H sap is a very conflicted species, with a tragic inability to anticipate the future realistically or to deal with future changes that have serious consequences.

Fir: Soon though, H sap won't be able to ignore the changes.

Cedar: Why does H sap ignore us? Fixing carbon is what we do all the time, pulling CO₂ out of the air by photosynthesis. Why don't they simply plant more of us trees?

Fir: Yes, that could help, but for a meaningful effect, it would have to be done all over the world, and it would take hundreds of years for the new trees to soak up enough CO₂ to return the climate to the way it was, say, 50 years ago. I hope that's not too complicated for you.

Cedar: Fine. So, if they want to fix carbon like we do, why don't they grow chloroplasts in their skin and start photosynthesizing, like we've been doing for millions of years?