

Lite Whines and Laughter

Finding the **HUMOR** in
Everyday Problems



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Chapter 1

Hair Peace

As the rock group Three Dog Night crooned back in the 70s, I have never been to Spain – or Portugal, for that matter. My hair, however, is fast approaching the size of the Iberian Peninsula. In fact, I've started referring to my neck as my isthmus. A stubborn, moisture-laden weather pattern has had my hair in its oppressive grip for the past 25 days. With humidity levels in the 700% range, my hair grows big, bigger and more bigger by the nanosecond. Let me tell you, *this* is the greenhouse effect that I'd like to see some experts tackle, one they could really sink their combs' teeth into. Although they'd likely never see their combs again as my Iberian Peninsula hair doubles as the Bermuda Triangle. It's nothing for small objects, such as barrettes, headbands and parakeets, to stay lost in my hair for days, weeks, even years. I'm pretty sure the bobby pin that shook loose from my hair the other day was part of the anchoring system for a French twist installed for my junior prom.

If you think I'm exaggerating or imagining things, you have never lived with my hair. Did I imagine the round brush that had to be cut free after becoming hopelessly tangled in my tresses? No. Did I imagine the barrette – bulging with the girth of my plumped-up locks—that finally gave way and *boinged* off my head, nearly putting out the eye of an innocent bystander? I did not. And finally, did I imagine the stage-whispered choruses of "Ch-ch-ch-chia" that followed me everywhere I went one particularly muggy day last summer? I assure you I did not.

Taming my hair is a formidable task even when the isobars are arranged in a more favorable pattern. Understand that we are talking about hair whose routine care and maintenance involves the use of a self-propelled Lawnboy and a weed whacker. Hair that regularly qualifies as the "two" in "two-for-one" memberships. But, I have to be careful what I say here because my hair is like a horse; it smells fear. If it catches even a whiff of uncertainty—much less outright fear—coming from me, I might as well invest in a hat factory because hair-wise I've lost the upper hand. Better to regard my hair as a spoiled pet who has been overindulged to the point of getting inflated ideas that far exceed his station in life. Better to keep a firm hand—or two—on it at all times. In other words, I must show my hair who's boss.

And I have assembled an arsenal of hair weaponry to help me do just that. From texturizers to contouring lotions to anti-frizz creams, I'm armed and ready for battle. I've been more or less holding my own during this recent soggy siege, but

there have been days when I've been forced to take more drastic measures against my expanding hair—like actually hosing it down so it didn't block my sightline to the rearview mirror. (It's possible I'm now developing root rot.) But since the latest weather report holds no promise of swift relief, I better try to make the best of the situation. You know, look for the positive in having hair the size of two countries. Use this as an opportunity to learn more about the cultures of Spain and Portugal. Hey, I could even dust off that old pair of castanets my sister brought back from Madrid years ago. There's just one problem...I have to untangle them from the back of my head first.

Chapter 2

Sex, Drugs and Metamucil

Ladies and gentlemen, we have been betrayed! Forget all the nonsense the medical establishment has fed you about healthy living and longevity. It's all been a pack of lies and I have proof. Exhibit A: Next week The Rolling Stones, with an average age higher than the members of the U.S. Supreme Court, kick off their first tour of American stadiums since 2007.

How is it possible that Sir Michael Philip Jagger, just shy of 72, is still whirling like a dervish while I can't tie my orthopedic shoes without triggering a muscle spasm? Take one look at him gyrating across the stage and then tell me how a lifetime regimen of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll can be bad for you. He's still got the moves like Jagger whereas I, the clean-living one, have the moves like someone playing a deranged version of Twister, awkwardly maneuvering to accommodate my plantar fasciitis, sciatica, and positional vertigo.

Well, starting today, I am getting serious about my health. To be honest, when I was much younger, I did play around a little with better living through sex, drugs—well, alcohol, anyway—and rock 'n' roll, but I realize that if you want real progress, you need to be consistent over time. So, I am committing to Mick's three-pronged approach. Of course, I understand that coming late to the party as I am, I may need to make some adjustments to his rigorous routine.

Adjustment #1, Sex: It will be limited to one partner, my husband. And my husband will sadly confirm that many nights I am so tired it would take a lot more than the Rolling Stones to start me up. As for physical limitations, again, expectations must be adjusted downward. These days I believe I would need lumbar support for phone sex.

Adjustment #2, Drugs: Okay, I am a total wash-out here, as I am probably one of three people who came of age in the last 50 years who never took any illegal substances (although, I did flirt with a pre-illegal substance, the artificial sweetener cyclamate before it was banned for causing cancer). It is unlikely that I will begin taking any hard drugs now unless, of course, Metamucil counts, in which case, I'm in deep. That leaves alcohol, a substance which I did use in my younger days, but apparently not in sufficient quantities to benefit from its preservative properties as was obviously the case with Sir Mick. Most of my alcohol consumption nowadays comes in the form of Nyquil.

Adjustment #3, Rock 'n' Roll: I am pretty good on this front, although it was

recently pointed out to me that I should check my Spotify playlists for expiration dates. I didn't realize that music had a limited shelf life, but I guess time really does keep on "slippin', slippin', slippin' into the future." Unfortunately, it seems I spend more and more time slidin', slidin', slidin' into the past.

I know it is unrealistic to think that I will ever see the results that Mick Jagger has enjoyed due to a lifetime of full-strength sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, but maybe, with a little luck and determination, my watered-down plan will at least enable me to move along with him through a verse or two of "Shattered." Aw, who am I kidding? I couldn't follow his footsteps even with my new arch supports. Maybe I'll sit down for a while, give my bunions a rest and just hum along. You know, I'm feeling better already.

Chapter 3

Fork This!

“Birds do it, bees do it, even educated fleas do it.” It seems, in fact, that absolutely everyone can do it. Everyone except me, that is. I am, of course, talking about eating with chop sticks. Here I am, a decent representative of the species *homo sapiens*, occupying the highest rung on the evolutionary ladder, yet I have apparently not developed the manual dexterity of an educated flea. Likely not even that of an uneducated one. How is this possible?

How can my fingers, which perform so competently in many other situations, fail me so thoroughly when I try to manipulate two simple slivers of wood? I stare at my fingers and they look so normal, so functional. And, indeed, they do function quite nicely in many other ways. They have yet to meet the pimple they couldn't pick or the mosquito bite they couldn't scratch to the point of infection. They point, snap and twiddle with grace and ease, with true mastery, I daresay. And their ability to silently and efficiently communicate a message is unmatched. Each finger moves in perfect coordination to signal everything from “OK” to “bye-bye.” (And sometimes, on a really bad day, one finger has acted alone to communicate my feelings quite accurately.) Yet, deposit a pair of chop sticks in my grip and suddenly all that expertise goes out the window. My fingers might as well be sheathed in boxing mitts for all the grace and coordination they display.

Why can't I do this? I have watched everyone from toddlers to centenarians effortlessly move all manner of victuals, from a single grain of rice to an oversized dumpling, from plate to mouth, with nary a slip or a drip. Not fair! Everyone in my family, the American *and* Italian *and* Colombian sides, can handle a pair of chop sticks with no more effort than it takes to pick up a pencil and jot down a phone number. I have even witnessed my former internist, a man famous for having fingers like five fat sausages, wielding a pair at Panda Express with pinpoint precision. Those sausage hands could barely *pick up* a scalpel, much less perform surgery with one, yet somehow magic happens with the chop sticks.

Awhile back I decided to give the chop sticks one more try, in preparation for my lunch with a group of my adult ESL students from Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Talk about performance anxiety! I didn't want to look like the stupid American and embarrass them at the restaurant, so I practiced every day for a week. I even got my neighbor from Thailand to tutor me. Finally, luncheon day arrived and I swear to you, I tried. I really, really tried. First, the chop sticks fell completely out of my hand. Then, they crossed like scissors, sending a bean, a cashew and a glob of sauce shooting across the table. Exasperated, humiliated, and really hungry, I was

about to put one stick in my fist and stab my food with it when one of my ever gracious students leaned in and gently asked, “Miss Lee, would you like a fork?”

“Yes, oh, yes,” I replied, grateful and relieved. “I think that might be best for all concerned.” I savored every remaining bite of that exquisite meal.

I may be tempted to try the chop stick thing again sometime in the future. And knowing myself as I do, I imagine it will go something like this: After two or three futile attempts to pick up a single morsel, my hunger and impatience will get the best of me. I’ll then throw down the sticks and declare in frustration, “Oh, fork this!

Chapter 4

I Forgot to Remember

Man, I really hate when I forget to do things. I don't mean forget-to-go-to-the-dry-cleaners kinds of things, which I do on a regular basis, or even forget-to-put-your-pants-on-before-going-to-work kinds of things, which I only do on a semi-regular basis. I mean things like "be independently wealthy" or "become the ruler of several small nation states" or "lose 15 pounds." I had fully intended to do these things—heck, they were numbers 1-3 on my list, for crying out loud—and then, somehow, I just *forgot*. And am I ever steamed now that I have started remembering all the things I have forgotten to do. For example, it completely slipped my mind that my husband and I were going to the beach early next month, and consequently, I forgot to lose weight. (I did, however, remember to eat a giant bag of peanut M&Ms, so now I have to remember to pack my collection of tasteful muumuu ensembles for day and evening wear.)

It's the same situation with the independently wealthy thing. Somehow I simply *forgot* to do it. This morning as I was struggling to stretch my double-digit checking account balance to cover a triple-digit credit card bill, I had a sudden "aha" moment wherein I exclaimed aloud, "Oh, shoot, I forgot to be filthy rich!" How could that have happened, I wondered? Had I, at some point in the past—a time I no longer recall, of course—rejected being filthy rich as a worthy goal? Had I, at some earlier time, also determined that being the ruler of several small nation states had too big a downside for me? I was pondering these questions quite seriously when I saw this quotation posted on my friend's Facebook page that seemed to explain it all: *I was going to conquer the world...but then I saw something shiny.*

Wow, what a revelation! This explains everything, I thought. Never had I consciously rejected any of my original goals in favor of others. Never had I deemed them unworthy pursuits and redirected my course. I had simply gotten distracted. Why, several times I'd been on my way to filthy richness or even zip-my-jeans thinness and then I'd started picking at my acrylic nails or sometimes the pills on my sweater and lost my train of thought. Often for years at a time!

Oh, yes, I see it all so clearly, and now that I do, I am determined not to be distracted anymore. From here on out, it's full speed ahead with to-do list items 1, 2 and—oh, my, gosh, look, a rainbow! I love rainbows, such pretty colors, purple is my favorite color, I have a purple umbrella in my car, I need to wash my car . . . wait, was I saying something before about "full-speed ahead"? Yeah, I think I was. What was it? Oh, never mind, I can't remember now. I guess I'll just enjoy the rainbow!

Chapter 5

Preemptive Rudeness

If unassertiveness training ever catches on, I will be hailed as the exalted grand poobah of the movement. I pride myself on my complete inability to be forceful, firm or aggressive. I am the woman who once fired a grossly incompetent house cleaner (whose idea of thorough cleaning was to flush the toilet after dumping her cigarette butts in it) with these harsh words: “Um, Wendy, I was wondering if, like, maybe you could not work here anymore. I mean, I’d still continue to pay you every week, of course, but, like, could you just not show up?”

Still, it’s not as if I have never had my moments of setting people straight. I am the essence of compliance...unless and until, that is, I encounter an act of what I call preemptive rudeness, when someone rudely warns me about my behavior before I even exhibit any behavior at all or have half a second to self-correct an inadvertent offense. Then I pretty much go off.

The incident that sort of set the bar for me in that regard occurred several years ago in West Virginia. I was minding my own business, unobtrusively making my way to my seat in a large sports arena, when my purse slipped off my shoulder and I stopped *momentarily* to reposition it. Instantly, a large, hairy, utterly unattractive boor bellowed, “More your ass. Ain’t no way you gonna stand there all night blocking my view.”

I was stunned! Why, it was as if he had read my mind, as that was exactly what I had planned—to pay top dollar for a ticket, and then stand mid-aisle, holding my heavy coat, purse, a large diet Coke and a bag of chips for two hours straight. What could be a more enjoyable way to watch a basketball game?

I turned around, went nose-to-nose with the drunken, grammatically-challenged behemoth, and sputtered through clenched teeth, “First of all, I have no intention of standing here all night, as I, unlike you, know what is appropriate behavior in public. I merely stopped for half a second to adjust my purse. Second of all, if by chance I were to accidentally block your view for an extended period of time, the proper way to call that to my attention to that would be to say, ‘Excuse me, *ma’am*, would you mind stepping out of the way so that I can see.’ And I would immediately apologize and oblige you. That’s called civil discourse. And right now, I think you should both thank me for enlightening you as well as apologize for your brutish behavior. Go on, I’m listening.”

I would like to say he had an etiquette epiphany right then and there, but in actuality he just yelled at my husband, “You better git yer woman outta my face

before I commence to punching her lights out.”

For an unassertive person, I have delivered a respectable number of dressing downs for preemptive rudeness, including to a haughty assistant bank manager, an officious clerk in the county records office and, what may have been my crowning achievement, a self-important optometrist with a bad nose job. I mention all of this now because just this afternoon I had a run-in with an offender that really raised my ire. It was a lovely late winter afternoon in Atlanta, made lovelier by the fact that I had the day off. I stopped at Panera to grab a salad and was looking forward to eating out on the sunny patio and just enjoying the spring preview weather. There was only one other person sitting out there, a woman at the opposite end whose back was turned to me. I set my tray on the table and myself on the chair, reached into my purse to retrieve my phone to check movie times and INADVERTENTLY touched an ad. The audio played for less than a millisecond, no, less than a microsecond, no, truly less than a nanosecond, before I stopped it.

Suddenly, the air was filled with what can only be described as a primal growl, “NOOOOO! Oh, no you don’t, not on my birthday! You are not coming out here and playing that thing on my birthday!”

I was so startled I jumped in my seat a bit and looked around, trying to determine where the unnatural sound was coming from. I finally figured out it was coming from the woman at the other end of the patio who still had her back turned to me. And as she continued her guttural grumbling, never once turning in my direction, I further figured out she was talking to me. Never mind that her ridiculous rant was several seconds longer, several decibels louder and infinitely more disturbing to the peace than my nanosecond breach of phone etiquette had been. I was so taken aback, my natural unassertive/apologetic reflexes kicked in.

“I’m so sorry. I accidentally touched an audio ad on my phone. I had no intention of playing anything out here,” I gushed, although by the end of my apology, I was feeling my stomach acid starting to churn in recognition of what was clearly an incident of preemptive rudeness.

And did she graciously accept my olive branch, perhaps even acknowledge with a smile that she had spoken too soon and too strongly? No! She continued in a mad, rambling monologue—addressed to the parking lot, I guess, as she still hadn’t turned around to face me—about her birthday, some damn idiots, cellular noise and her not taking it anymore.

At that point, I determined that this was not a simple case of preemptive

rudeness, but one with complications of full-on looniness. An act of assertiveness in this instance might well have ended with my being stabbed in the eye with a salad fork. I picked up my tray and purse and repaired to the safety of an inside table.

“I can’t believe you came back inside on this gorgeous day,” said one of the employees who knows me and my penchant for eating outside in any weather short of a blizzard.

“Well, there’s a birthday party going on out there and I didn’t want to intrude,” I explained.

“There is?” she asked, confused.

“Yeah, a small party, a party of one, actually,” I replied. “And trust me, the guest list is one you don’t want to be on.”

Looking out at the beautiful blues skies and sunshine that I was being forced to enjoy through glass, I muttered under my breath, “Happy damn birthday, you loon.”

Call me unassertive if you must, but sometimes it’s best to let mad dogs lie.

Chapter 6

The Eyes Have It

Okay, Bobbi Brown, now I'm mad! You, the savior who came to my rescue after Lancôme cavalierly turned their backs on me a few years ago, have just managed to tick me off. Make no mistake, I am a woman who needs your eyeliner—not likes or enjoys, but needs, as in requires for my daily survival! In an unfair twist of fate, I ended up with a completely mismatched set of features: dark brown hair, bestowed first by nature and in the last decade or so by L'Oreal, incongruously coupled with very fair skin, light eyes and nearly invisible lashes. I'm not kidding, my lashes, although of decent length, are practically clear. It seems to violate some natural law for a person to have such dark hairs springing from her head and such colorless ones fringing her eyes, but that's what I have. If I am not wearing eye make-up, my eyes recede into nothingness, blending in so completely with my complexion that it looks as if I have pinholes instead of eyes. And with increasing age has come the increasing transparency of my eyelids, so that they now have a pinkish, inflamed hue to them, not unlike those of a white rat.

So, yes, eyeliner is essential for me if I want to avoid shrieks of “Run, it's the rat lady” as small children flee from me in horror. In fact, I have found that for everyday wear, I can actually skip the mascara and shadow as long as I use a good eyeliner, a move which simultaneously safeguards the emotional well-being of impressionable children and affords me an extra snooze cycle on workday mornings. Until about four years ago, my go-to product was Lancôme's cake eyeliner applied with a wet brush, but as has happened with so many of my beloved products over the years—not to mention my first husband— it up and dumped me without any warning. When I found out Lancôme's liner was being discontinued, I bought up all the remaining stock I could, but eventually I came to the end of my stash. I frantically scoured cosmetics counters and the Internet for a comparable replacement, to no avail. The eyeliner market was heavily flooded with various types of pencils and pens, but none of them were suited to my eye lid specifications. The pencils were too smeary and the pens were too hard to control. And neither was compatible with upper lid crepiness. I was completely bereft...until, like manna from heaven, Bobbi Brown Long-Wear Gel Eyeliner fell into my hands, via my friend in St. Louis who picked it up on QVC and my daughter who bought it at a mall in Providence, Rhode Island—both in the same week, so it was obviously fate. This liner, in Espresso Ink, is a magnificent product, no hyperbole at all here. It slides, glides, and hides. It defines without smearing, peeling or cracking. It just about restored my will to live when I used it for the first time, and I have lined my eyelids in Espresso Ink nearly every day since. At 23

bucks a pop, it's not exactly bargain priced, but you can't put a price on magnificence.

So what's the problem, you ask. You know the saying about having too much of a good thing? Well, that is the problem in a nutshell, or a .1- ounce/3 gram glass jar, in this case. Although that sounds like a miniscule amount, it is actually a lot of eyeliner. So much liner, in fact, that it is virtually impossible to get to the bottom of the jar before its "gelliness" expires. Short of using it to draw a mustache, beard and sideburns every day, there is no way one woman with the standard issue two upper and two lower lids can go through that much liner before its luxuriously smooth texture turns to dehydrated brittle clumps. Every time I reach this point, it's the same routine. Unable to bring myself to throw out half a jar—that's \$11.50 worth—of liner, I try different ways to extend its usability. This morning I excavated the top crusted layers with a cuticle pusher, trying to uncover a little pocket of still pliable gel; I applied the clumps one at a time and tried to fuse them together to form a line; I wet the brush with water and even a bit of moisturizer. All epic fails, as the kids say. I finally acknowledged defeat, threw out the jar and headed off to Nordstrom to shell out another \$23.00, plus tax, for a jar of gel liner, knowing full well that half of it will be lost to me. What is the reasoning here, Bobbi? Why not sell half as much for half the price and eliminate not only the waste of product and packaging, but also my frustration. I appreciate a manufacturer who actually tries to give you more than you expected, but if half of the product goes bad before you have enough time to use it, what's the point? I can't live without you, Bobbi, but I gotta be honest here, a little of you goes a long way!

Chapter 7

Thanks for Nothing

Okay, okay, it's not as if I can't spout the party line about how it's more blessed to give than to receive, but let's be honest, when you give, you don't really feel all that blessed until the recipient acknowledges your thoughtfulness. And it wouldn't hurt if they threw in a little something about how you look as if you'd lost weight, too. After all, they're getting the hard goods; the least they could do is throw some cheap praise your way.

I am such a compulsive thanker that I actually send thank you cards to people for sending me a thank you card. I sometimes worry that I will get caught in a thanking loop with someone like myself and neither of us will be able to stop. We'll just go on endlessly thanking each other, sounding like the Goofy Gophers Mac and Tosh, "Thank you, my dear." "Oh, no, thank *you*, my dear" "No, no, I insist, thank *you*," *ad infinitum*.

If my recent experiences with gift recipients are any indication, however, I needn't lose sleep worrying that I will be swept away by a giant wave of gratitude any time soon. It's been five weeks since I mailed out two separate gifts and I have yet to hear one word, grateful or otherwise, from either recipient. No card or call, not even an email or a stinking Facebook message. And bear in mind, I was hardly required to gift either of these people—there were more than six degrees of separation between us, a friends-of-friends kind of thing—but I thought it would be a nice gesture and, yes, I had been looking forward to the feeling of satisfaction that comes from knowing your efforts were appreciated.

Unable to fully believe that people could be so blatantly rude and ill-mannered as to neglect acknowledging my gift, I consider all the alternate explanations for their lack of response. Perhaps the thank you cards were delivered to the wrong address, to a band of hooligans who shamelessly trash wrongly delivered mail rather than redirect it to the proper destination. Or maybe they were stolen out of my mailbox by someone even more desperate for recognition that I am. Or maybe they were lost in the mail altogether, even though every instance I know of where something was "lost" in the mail it was "lost" only by virtue of never having been put in the mail in the first place. This is particularly true with alimony checks. Still, it remains a possibility, and if I accept that it's possible that the cards got lost in the mail, then I must concede that it's equally possible that the gifts themselves got lost and never reached their intended destinations. So, I will reserve final judgment on the two mailed-gift recipients until I figure out a way to confirm that they in fact received the packages. (I will ply our common friend with

prescription-strength chocolate and then get her to agree to grill the offenders on my behalf.)

Unfortunately, there can be no such reprieve from judgment for a third recipient, as I delivered the gift to her in person, thus eliminating all doubt about whether or not she had received it. And, I must say, her reaction, or, more precisely, her complete lack thereof, was the most stunningly rude of all. I presented her with the gift bag before work one morning last week. She took the bag from my hand, set it down on her desk and simply said, “Oh, I have a gift bag with this same design.” And that was it. I stood there for a moment and then awkwardly babbled something about just wanting to give her a little something for the baby she’d had shortly before she started working in my office (which, P.S., was before I even knew her). She moved the tissue aside a little, peered in the bag and then pushed the bag to the side and continued typing.

Feeling more uncomfortable by the second, I excused myself with, “Well, okay, that’s all then, um, thanks” and scurried out of her office. When I got back to my desk, I realized that I had actually thanked her! For what? For granting me the privilege of giving her a gift for which she offered no thanks? Oh, well, at least someone got thanked, I thought. Mac and Tosh would be proud. But next time I thank someone for letting me give them a gift, I suppose I should add something about how they look thinner to me. After all, it’s the polite thing to do.

Chapter 8

Gee, You Shouldn't Have . . . Really

I think I speak for most women when I say I love to get presents. Birthdays, anniversaries, St. Swithin's Day—all occasions that demand presents, in my opinion. I love getting presents so much that I devised a plan to rotate among different religions throughout the year in order to increase my gift-getting opportunities. (And in the process I learned that three separate holidays intersect on February 2—the Druid Imbolc, the Christian Candlemas and the secular Ground Hog Day. Store that little nugget away for your next trivia night.)

It's important to note that I am the ideal gift recipient. I don't require expensive purchases and I am extremely easy to please. From aardvark-shaped candles to dry erase markers, I think everything is a treat. Once I even graciously accepted a pair of black XXL pantyhose from a student—and gave growing into them a real shot when another student gave me a gift card to Ben & Jerry's.

But recently I have run up against a gift-getting situation that I'm not sure how to handle. On three separate occasions, from three separate and unrelated people, I have received various anti-wrinkle potions formulated for "aging skin." I'm not talking about fancy body lotion sets that are more cosmetic than therapeutic; I'm talking about down and dirty, pull-no-punches wrinkle cream for industrial strength Shar-Pei faces. And each person that "gifted" me implied pretty much the same thing, saying, "I saw this and thought of you" or "I wanted to get you something you could really use." Seriously? Did no one but me get the memo that 70 is the new 20?

I can't decide whether to be grateful or insulted. On the one (wrinkled) hand, these are expensive products, ones I really did want to try sometime, but on the other (liver-spotted) hand, shouldn't I be the one to determine that the time has come? I was silently contemplating this very question when my husband walked in the room.

"Hey, what are you doing just sitting around?" he asked. "Lesser Quinquatrus starts tomorrow, doesn't it? I figured you'd have the whole house decorated by now."

He was right. It was the eve of Lesser Quinquatrus, the ancient Roman holiday celebrating flute players, but I wasn't feeling particularly festive. "I've decided to cut back on holidays for a while," I said, with a shrug.

"But what about your big plan to increase your gift-getting opportunities?" he asked, somewhat shocked.

“I’m putting that on hold for now,” I replied. “Let’s just say it developed a wrinkle or two I hadn’t foreseen and leave it at that.”

You know what, folks, here’s a little tip—next St. Swinthin’s Day, just say it with cash!

Chapter 9

Stuck in the Middle with Myself

I pride myself on having a wide range of female friends. And I mean wide range rather literally as several of my girlfriends happen to be clustered at the extreme ends of the height spectrum. Over the years, I have listened sympathetically to each end gripe about the ridiculous-to-rude remarks they routinely endure, but lately it's become almost a competition about who has it worse, the under-talls or the over-talls. I feel their pain, and if your personal altitude has exposed you to unfair ridicule and mockery, I feel your pain as well. But you all are not the only ones suffering injustice on the vertical plane. Why leave me out? This is still America, gosh darn it, and I intend to claim my fair share of victimhood.

Now hear this: middle dwellers suffer too. We are your mothers, your sisters and your daughters, although it's likely you never noticed us as we blend into the crowd without distinction. We of nondescript height are neither charmingly petite nor alluringly statuesque. We are stuck in the middle, part of the pack, just one of the herd. If height were hair color, we'd be dishwater blond. If height were grades, we'd be a "C" average. We are neither rare, nor well-done; we are plainly and unremarkably medium. Medium, a breath away from mediocre.

We are the usual; you are the unusual. We are the typical; you are the atypical. We are the expected; you are the exceptional. Let's face it, we average-heighters put the ordinary in extraordinary. Even the Bible eschews those of us who occupy the middle ground. It says we, the lukewarm, being neither hot nor cold, will be spit out of God's mouth. Spit out of the mouth of the Almighty (who presumably made us this way in the first place!). That's a bit more severe than having to suffer foolish comments like "How's the weather up there?" or "You don't have far to go when you fall down."

You, both the height-gifted and the height-challenged, command attention wherever you go. Heads turn and tongues wag when you walk in a room because you are, folks say, "something to see." The most people say about us middle-of-the-roaders, if they say anything at all, is that we are nothing to write home about. So, tall ones and small ones, be grateful for your major or minor stature. It accords you recognition we fair-to-middling types will never attain. Tiptoes can never lift me high enough nor slouching push me low enough to be of note, a status you achieve just by being who you are. And who better to be other than yourself?

Come to think of it, who better for any of us—high, low or somewhere in between—to be other than ourselves? I hereby declare the height-whining competition null and void. (But, I still think I should have won!)

Chapter 10

Pooped Out

I am pooped out. Literally. No, really, I literally mean literally pooped out. You see, I had a colonoscopy this morning, which required me to spend all day yesterday “prepping” for it. That means that in the past day-and-a-half, a heck of a lot more has come out of me than has gone in. In fact, post-procedure, the only thing I’m full of right now is air, although even that is beginning to make its way out of me and I am very grateful that I am home alone.

As humiliating medical procedures go, a colonoscopy ranks right up there, but it does have a few things going for it in my opinion. For one, it is an equal opportunity humiliater. Unlike the mammogram and pelvic exam which assault parts only women have, a colonoscopy is no respecter of gender. Both the object of its scrutiny as well as its point of entry are, like opinions, things everyone has.

Second, you at least get some pay-off for the crappy prep day in the form of a wonderful, drug-induced nap. As both a skilled napper and a veteran of four “scopings,” I speak with some authority when I say this is one of the highest quality naps your insurance dollars can buy. You are out immediately and completely, no tossing, no turning, no counting of sheep. True, you are violated with a couple of feet of flexible tubing while you are asleep, but that seems a fair exchange, especially if it gets you out of work for a day or two.

Third, as unpleasant as the prep process is, when it’s over, you feel oddly invigorated—once the post-anesthesia goofiness passes, that is. You are, intestinally speaking, as clean as a whistle, purged of all the debris that was weighing you down and ready to make a fresh start. The physical sensation of newness might even motivate you to renew commitments in other areas of your life. You could use the prep process as a sort of reset button for all your flagging New Year’s resolutions. Or you could just use it to justify eating a pint of chocolate gelato the next day; that’s good too.

With a family history of colon cancer, regular colonoscopies are something I take very seriously. Getting hit from behind, so to speak, every few years is a small price to pay for preventing a deadly disease. Even so, such an intimate encounter, especially the first time around, can leave you and your dignity feeling a little compromised. A bit embarrassed after his initial experience, my friend told his doctor, “Jeez, you could at least offer to buy me to lunch after that.” Yes, and cab fare home with a promise to call soon would be nice gestures as well, but dream on. Such expectations are unrealistic in today’s “stick ‘em and street ‘em” society,

so, you just gotta put on—well, take off, actually— your big girl panties/big boy pants and roll over on your side.

My doctor may never have bought me lunch or supplied my cab fare, but she has given me many a reassuring hug as well as her word that together she and I are doing all the right things to keep my bowels unobstructed and open for business. And, occasionally, like today, she even gives me a little bonus. Waking from my propofol slumber this morning, I found tucked into my hand a special reminder of our time together—a souvenir photograph of my internal hemorrhoid. Now that alone, my friends, was worth the price of submission!