

Jottings: August agonies

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I'm always reluctant to turn my calendar to August. The eighth month of the year and I do not enjoy a good relationship. Good things have happened in August, but not in comparison to the bad.

Even in childhood, growing up on an Iowa farm, there seemed to be a cloud of melancholy hovering in August and I'm not sure why. Maybe it was because days were growing shorter and, though still hot and humid, weather was slowly shifting into fall with school starting soon. I loved school, but the transition from summer's carefree days to hours spent in a hot musty one-room school always took a couple weeks — and then it would be September and I'd be fine.

I am usually a "glass-half-full" type person; but by the end of August, my glass is nearly empty. The month starts off innocently with son-in-law Mike's birthday, Aug. 2, often celebrated during annual family gatherings at the beach where we've had many good times. But other August vacations are memorable because of their catastrophes.

A 1960s August trip, with our two young children, to visit friends and relatives who, as departing houseguests, had whimsically invited us to "come see them sometime." Plans went awry early on as we altered our itinerary to fit into everyone's schedule, which kept changing throughout the trip. Adding to the mixture of minor disasters, 2-year-old Johnny got an ear infection and 6-year-old Betsy got mumps on our last visit of the trip. She exposed not only my cousin's two children but also brother Johnny and her mother. I had not had mumps in my childhood and I have never been sicker than I was the rest of that August.

It was the 8th month, 18th day, 1988, about 8 p.m. when, on a trip to Oregon and visiting at our nephew's home, I headed down a darkened hallway of closed doors. I stepped into what I thought was the bathroom. Only it wasn't. I had taken a giant step into a stairwell, crashing to the bottom with my elbow puncturing the wall. The aftermath of this event included: an ambulance, hospital stay, surgery and cast on my left elbow,

extreme pain, unable to travel home, spending two additional weeks with Betsy and Mike (who provided excellent care) and months of physical therapy after returning home. Since then, I do not claim eight as my lucky number.

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Three years later, Aug. 19, 1991, while walking the dog, an approaching dog broke away from its walker, attacked my dog and tripped me into the midst of a dog altercation and an entanglement of leashes. The next day I was having surgery on my right elbow, followed by several weeks of therapy.

And then there was Aug. 26, 2009. My husband, Dick, took off for a routine bike ride about 10:00, saying he'd be home for lunch. At 10:30 a policewoman was at my door telling me he'd been in a serious biking accident and was on his way to the ER at OHSU. His doctor later described it as a "death-defying, life-altering accident" and it was. He lived with physical and mental disabilities for seven years, surviving several surgeries and other health issues, many of them occurring in August.

This August I vow to keep my glass half-full. I will again celebrate Mike's birthday, and also Betsy's fifth anniversary of breast cancer recovery (diagnosed in August 2017). Then the biggest event of this year will occur Aug. 20 when granddaughter Natalie and Daniel will be wed at a resort on Crane Lake in Minnesota. Since long-distance travel is no longer on my

"able-to-do" list, my heart and thoughts will be there with all my family as I watch from afar.

This year I'm flipping my calendar to August with great expectations that any potential catastrophes are taking a sabbatical, and it will be an agony-free month.

Jo Ann Parsons is a member of the Jottings group at Lake Oswego Adult Community Center.