

Country Real E, state#334: August 8, 2014

How much is too much?

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va. Ive been thinking about dead weight this week.

Theres weight, and then...theres *dead weight*. The operational difference lies in how hard it is to move a something—or a someone.

The weight in the song of that name by The Band is, I think, about living with the heaviness of adult responsibilities. (But it could just as easily be about the bearable lightness of puzzling words that rhyme in a catchy tune.)

Dead weight doesnt change itself, doesnt shift. It just is. Olympian Zeus condemned Atlas, a defeated Titan, to stand still at the edge of the world and carry the dead weight of the heavens on his shoulders.

This punishment physically separated Gaia, the earth, and Ouranos, the sky, which kept them from having any more sex. A twofer, that Zeus! Easier prophylactics are now widely available.

When youre in Manhattan, you can visit Lee Oscar Lauries huge 1937 bronze Atlas bearing his armillary sphere at Rockefeller Center on Fifth Avenue.

Lauries Atlas looks like a romanticized Benito Bo dybuilder Mussolini on steroids. At that time, the Italian dictator was known for posing, strutting, jaw-jutting and getting in over his head.

It has occurred to me from time to time that John D. Rockefeller, Jr., might have approved this image, because it showed the people of the world as one in dutifully bearing the weight of ill-gotten, concentrated wealth. Art can be understood in many ways, of course.

Today's column came to me in the form of the 350-pound, cast-iron woodstove in our living room.

This Vermont Castings *Defiant* and I have been together 30 years. Once, we were young and gay. Now, we are old and gray.

The *Defiant* was ready for a third rebuild. Internal organs had ruptured. I don't need to go into the clinical details.

The plan was simple. I would wiggle, grunt and lift the stove onto my homemade, four-wheel dolly, strap it tight, roll both onto the front porch, lift it with the forks of my tractor and place it in the back of the pickup for delivery to local genius welder Steve Good.

I moved the Oriental rug out of the way and positioned the dolly close to the stove. I snugged the eight-inch-high dolly with two cinder blocks on rubber doormats to keep it from rolling on the living-room floor like a loose cannon as I inched the stove onto it.

I scooted the stove into position, rocking it toward the dolly, first one corner and then another.

I lifted the stove toward the dolly. I realized that it had become a lot heavier than when I did this 12 years ago.

I lifted harder and a little higher. As I got the stove's two front legs on the edge of the dolly, it started scooting away from me like the girl I once took to the Silver Lake Drive In when I was in high school. (The Drive In, incidentally, was built on ground that had once been Silver Lake. It was still a little mushy around the edges and in the back seat.) My dolly wanted no part of my woodstove.

I then discovered that I couldn't lift the stove's rear end high enough to get it on the dolly. The aptly named *Defiant* was doing its best to run off to Italy and see what Mussolini is up to these days. I found myself trying to lift the stove while trying to keep the dolly from fleeing with my spare foot.

After an hour of lifting, shifting, jacking and swearing, I had the stove on the dolly and strapped. The stove's feet were at the

dollys very corners. Any jiggle and wiggle would separate dolly and stove just like Gaia and Ouranos.

I rolled the dolly through the house and onto the porch. I got the tractors fork extensions under the dolly and raised the forks.

The four-foot-long extensions wiggled and jiggled just enough.

The *Defiant* slid off the dolly, which breathed a sigh of relief, and stopped between the forks. Then it rolled over with its feet in the air.

I delivered the stove upside down.

It was not my finest moment. Atlas had dropped the ball.

After spending four hours wrestling this stove on a hot, soupy day, I reluctantly concluded that either the *Defiant* had put on pounds over the years or I had lost strength. It was now too much dead weight for one of me to handle.

On Tuesday night, I read a review in The Wall Street Journal of The Removers by Andrew Meredith. It is a morticians memoir that concerns the heft and haulage of lifes dead weights.

The phrase struck me. While reviewer Thomas Lynch was referring to the literal weight of dead bodies, I'm sure that many of us have had to drag around one of *lifes* dead weightsillness, untimely death, debt, failure, divorce, a loveless union.

Some we bear like Atlas. Some we try to get out of. Others we load for repair and end up with them upside down...like my woodstove. Some we manage to hold up.

Here are four farm-tested tips for handling dead weight.

Get help. Extra hands spread the burden, even when they're not very skilled.

Move slowly. It's easy to make big decisions quickly; it's harder and takes longer to rectify big decisions made too quickly and without sufficient research.

Try not to lose control of a weight that's big and heavy.

Once on its own, a runaway can drag you anywhere.

Plan the move before you do it. An ounce of planning is worth more than a ton of regret.

Had Benito Mussolini read this column, he might not have ended on a meat hook hanging upside down from the roof of an Esso gas station in Milan.

Its quite possible that he and his girlfr iend, Clara Petacci, would have had a better time at the Silver Lake, even in the front seat.

