

Country Real Estate, #352: December 31, 2014
A square point may be good enough
By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va. I spent Saturday, December 27th, my 69th birthday, working out but not very hard and sharpening big, corner fence posts but not very pointy.

I wrote not a single line of lies, libel, make-believe or anything desperately intended to be the truth. The world was not diminished by my failure to contribute. No one complained.

I did, on the other, email a number of thank-yous to people wishing me a happy birthday courtesy of either Facebook or impeccable memories for forgettable milestones.

Sharpening 75 corners is tedious and time-consuming, but its not hard labor. Each black locust post is nine-feet long and up to 16 inches in diameter. The heaviest probably weighs 300 pounds. Sunk four-feet deep, they should last 50 years.

With a 20-inch blade on my chainsaw, I make four angled-outward cuts from the fat end. I leave a tip one-to-two-inches square. This thick stub breaks through rocks in the ground.

Ripping a locust log at an angle to its grain dulls a chain almost as fast as running it into unseen rocks, a practice with which I am more than familiar. In dry, dead locust, I often see sparks flying in the cut.

Sometimes its best to not either make your point as sharply as you can or put too fine a point on blunt statements of truth.

Most of my posts are too heavy to lift by hand and back. (Im talking about real posts not Internet wall hangings, which often weigh next to nothing, or less.)

I roll them around with a cant hook, which is a 48-inch-long, wood-handled lever with a moveable metal hook -- called a dog -- at the working end.

Next spring when the ground is wet and soft, I will chain the too-big-to-wrestle-around posts to my tractors front forks, dangle them into position and then pound them into place with a hydraulic post driver. Depending on the drivers size, each thump amounts to a drop of 30,000 to 100,000 pounds.

It takes about 20 drops to sink a corner post so that it will stay put and not gallivant around looking for a nicer hole.

I wish I could sharpen my wits as easily, even to a square point.

I was in Bodos in Charlottesville two weeks ago with our daughter. She ordered, and then the counter clerk turned to me.

I want a small black coffee and one everything bagel with He looked at me.

...with (The image of cream cheese sprang into my mind, minus the name.)

...with

My daughter looked at me. So what joke is he pulling now? ...with Yes? the clerk asked helpfully.

...with (It didnt occur to me to look at the menu on the wall.) Hes waiting, Dad, Molly said helpfully.

...with (I knew I wanted the light version...of something.) Maybe the clerk thought I had a really bad stutter.

...with (Anxiety impedes recall. What the hells the matter with me?)

...with (I had certainly mastered with.)

Finally, someone said cream cheese. It wasnt me.

This is typical age-related memory loss, not Alzheimers.

My thinking seems to be the same, such as it is. I compute the same, such as that is. My judgment is the same, which was never very good. And I continue to produce a lot of writing, a

course on writer and reader alike.

But every so often I will be navigating the world and fall into a very narrow pothole of memory loss—usually a single word or name.

The other day, I couldn't come up with the file in file cabinet. A few days before, I climbed out of a name hole for David ... the television personality. By association with bad weather, I pulled up David Frost.

Memory loss can be a precursor to mild cognitive impairment and dementia. I'm pretty sure that I'm no more demented than usual. Denial, of course, may be a sign of early onset.

I try to take care of my aging hippocampus, the two seahorse-shaped things in the center of my brain that store memory. I feed them vitamins, antioxidants, omega-3 fats, crossword puzzles and treadmill miles. Maybe, the old hippo was remembering that cream cheese was bad for me and didn't want to be an accomplice.

Friends my age email around whistling-in-the-dark jokes about missing memory like this one:

A son goes to visit his father in the storage section of an old-age home. He sees his father sitting calmly on a sofa next to the entrance. He goes up to him, kneels down and asks: Do you know who I am?

His Dad looks at him carefully. No, I don't. But if you ask that young fellow at the desk, he'll be happy to tell you who you are.

It would be nice if age-related, memory lapses could be programmed to wipe out the recall of bad past behaviors—or better yet, the behaviors themselves.

This doesn't seem to be in the cards held by primates, or at least, the hand that I hold.

The real problem with memory is that you remember the stuff that you don't want to remember and forget the stuff that you do. I need to speak to someone in charge about this, as soon as I recall who that person is.

And so in the New Year of 2015, I hope to remember more things than I forget.

The trick, I think, is to keep the good memories sharp as they are driven in. Let the bad ones fend for themselves.

And so I end

with ...with

...with

...with best wishes for the New Year.

(At least I didn't write best wishes, which shows that my judgment is not regressing.)