

Wring out the old; ring in the new

Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—The year 2012 left Blue Grass with bad juju.

On the day after Christmas, Melissa slipped on the narrow back stairs into the kitchen and pummeled her back and hip. She spent 40 minutes eyeballing the floor tiles while answering questions like: “Can you move anything at all?” She’s now moving most things gingerly.

Early the following day in the 4 a.m. darkness, I knocked over the floor lamp next to my side of our bed. One of those \$1,000 curlicue light bulbs that are guaranteed to last for 500 years shattered over the hardwood floor.

After removing the shards, I went downstairs to find that the cat had up-chucked in the living room, and the dog had gone through the kitchen trash looking for smell goods.

Finding nothing of interest, Nellie settled for candy out of a dish on the counter, including about 20 aluminum-foil wrappers. She now wants to go on television to sell chocolate metal-reaming kits for all intestines. Only \$19.95, plus shipping and handling.

Later that morning, a certain young adult who runs around with some of my DNA was taking a shower upstairs when water began leaking into the downstairs dining room--suspiciously below the tub. I was told by the females of my pride not to make a causal connection between the showering activity and the leaking activity. Instead, I was redirected toward bad juju.

And on the 28th, Melissa, despite her contusions, soldiered up to make a day-late cheesecake for my birthday when, without warning, the springform pan decided to spring open on its own—while baking. Warmed batter exploded over everything inside and outside the oven.

I was not home when the cheesecake decided to free itself from springform bondage. Nonetheless, I accepted full responsibility, since it was my birthday that led to the cheesecake idea, which led to the springform pan rebelling, which led to the Big Bang, which led to Melissa scouring the kitchen hospital-style.

I’ve since discovered that a woman in Oslo, Norway more than a century ago also blew up her husband’s birthday cheesecake when her back was hurting. Edvard Munch used her as a model for *The Scream*.

On the 29th, a neighbor's cattle got out in the road to practice pirouettes and wind sprints while all of America's participants dangled over a cliff that was constructed to extort a solution from the very individuals who created the precipice in the first place. I always feel good about being held hostage by those rooting against my rescue.

Bad juju tends to run in clusters. Unfortunately, you never know how bad each cluster will be or how much good time you have between them.

We always start new years, new projects, new jobs and new relationships with enthusiasm. Often as not, we end with some disappointment. Only a few things ever live up to our highest hopes.

If we were easily satisfied with whatever is, we would not try anything new or different, or change very much.

On the other hand, too much disappointment is overwhelming. So maybe it would be better to start 2013 with just a few humble flickers of hope. Forget self-improvement resolutions. Forget manufactured passions. No grand goals. No expectations of cheesecakes without commotion.

That won't do, of course. Starting something new inevitably generates hope, regardless of whether the outcome has any chance of meeting the expectation.

Hope comes before doing. It is one of our admirable qualities.

Hope may spring eternal in the human breast, as Alexander Pope wrote, but it's also been known to spring from other areas, which can cause a lot of trouble. I don't want to be seen as a naive hope freak.

So here are a few small sprouts of hope that might make it through the hostilities of January and February. I hope that

Melissa's back gets better soon;
Cattle will learn that grass is rarely greener on asphalt highways;
Nothing above my head will spring a leak;
Nothing below my feet will prove treacherous;
All light bulbs will eventually be made of unbreakable material;
Nellie will stop trashing the trash, and the cat will take his up-
chucking outside;
All pregnancies will be wanted;
All children will be loved;
All cliffs will be avoided;
All prepositions will not be the last word about anything worth
fighting for;
And all bad juju will end quickly.

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