

Humor Me

By Ronald P. Culberson

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“Scarred for (Mid) Life”

There’s a new show on MTV. It’s called *Scarred* and it’s packed with videos of young thrill seekers who break bones, crack skulls and crush their “egos” while engaging in extreme skateboarding, bicycling and other dangerous “ing” activities. I love this show! While the twisted body parts put my faint-ing threshold to the test, I think the crashes stimulate some sort of testosterone laden, mid-life, agony-of-defeat gland in my head that releases a pleasant surge of adrenaline throughout my body.

Now I’m no risk junkie but I do believe my desire for risk has increased as I approach mid-life (OK, fine, so I have arrived already). It’s as if I know that one day, when I’m playing balloon tennis in an assisted living facility, I’ll wish I had taken more risks. And I don’t think I’m alone. Many middle-aged men seek the risk of a woman half their age or a convertible that’s one ticket away from a suspended license. And aging women get a full body shiver from the sting of a Botox needle or the approaching limit on their credit cards.

For me the rush comes from athletic activities that are well beyond my physical and mental abilities. For instance, I recently bought a mountain bike since road biking is for sissies like Lance Armstrong. But since I haven’t ridden off road since I was a young boy, I sought the council of my younger, physically fitter neighbor Gil who is an excellent mountain biker.

Before our first trek and while we were still in the parking lot, Gil suggested that we go over a few important “techniques.” I watched him demonstrate the proper braking, leaning and steering maneuvers and then I saw him “jump” his bike over small curb. The maneuver looked relatively simple and being the confident student that I am, I gave it a shot.

I yanked on the handlebars which lifted my front wheel a full 2 millimeters off the ground. The back wheel stayed glued to the pavement. The weight of my body forced my right foot off the pedal and as my foot slammed to the ground, the pedal ripped across my shin. The blood ran down my leg. The adrenaline pumped through my veins. I yearned for the rugged trail so that no one would see that I had hurt myself while still in the park-ing lot.

The next week, I returned to the same course with more confidence and less fear. At one creek crossing, I tried to pop my front wheel onto a small slat bridge. Somehow the wheel became jammed against the first slat and the ground. Regrettably, my brakes

were fully engaged which according to some obscure law of physics locked my front wheel causing my back wheel to rise up in the air like a cheap carnival ride taking me over the handlebars towards the bridge and the creek. Being the agile, young-minded, he-man that I am, I avoided a nasty crash by jumping off the bike. Luckily no one was looking but the almost-broken-clavicle experience led to quite a rush. It was better than Mountain Dew.

The next week I rode the trail by myself. My wife casually asked what I'd do if I crashed while on the course alone. I assured her that I had my cell phone with me and as long as I was physically able to use it, I'd call for help. She just shook her head.

All went well until I got to that same slat bridge that had given me trouble the week before. Confident in my improved skills, I knew I could tackle it this time. Apparently, however, there is a part of the brain that remembers our past traumas and will do everything within its power to prevent us from reliving them. This cranial barrier sends signals throughout our bodies leading to significantly diminished physical abilities. As a result of this mind-body phenomenon, I once again took flight over my handlebars. This time, however, my foot was stuck to the pedal and I sailed over the bridge into the embankment on the other side of the creek.

I was covered in mud, the bike was on top of me and my shoulder was buried in the ground. Nothing was broken on me or the bike and luckily no one saw me fall. But the adrenaline rush was overwhelming. Two days later, my thighs looked like a purple mountain majesty. I was scarred for mid-life.

As soon as I can move my right leg better, I WILL conquer that bridge.

Until next time, just humor me.

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