



Big Bad Wolf

By Wayne and Tamara

I have been friends with my sister-in-law for 25 years. I've been there for her during many heartbreaking situations, even putting my marriage on the line at times.

Our relationship has been mostly one-sided. My sister-in-law is self-centered, demanding, and doesn't hold back on being deliberately cruel if things don't go her way. Due to my forgiving nature and dislike of confrontation, I tried to rise above it all.

That is, until now. I am going through an extremely unpleasant divorce. My ex moved on and said and did damaging things. Still I keep it all bottled up inside and never say a bad word against him to his family.

My brother-in-law recently confided that under the pretense of a nice day out, my sister and mother-in-law plan to pump me for information to pass along to my ex. My brother-in-law says he is disgusted with what they are saying and wants me to know what I am up against.

Comments he passed on make me know he's telling the truth. I am appalled. My in-laws always said I'm the most wonderful person with the loveliest disposition of anyone they ever met. I thought they genuinely cared about me.

Obviously I do not want to engage in any way with my sister-in-law, but she's pushing to meet with me. I wish to call it a day, in writing, as I will be a wreck if I have to do it verbally. How can I do this without betraying my brother-in-law's confidence?

Simone

Simone, there are two reasons not to put your feelings in writing. One, it makes you appear weak, and two, it gives your in-laws something concrete to criticize, and they will nitpick every statement and comma in your letter.

Like the first of the Three Little Pigs, you've been living in a house of straw. It is easy to describe your disposition as motivated by kindness, but in fact it is motivated by fear. You think writing a letter is like building a house of sticks, but the true solution is to build a house of bricks.

Your sister-in-law and her mother didn't tell you what their game plan is. You don't need to tell them your game plan or what you know. At your door or on the phone all you need is a simple, curt refusal. If you must use an excuse, tell them the upheaval of the divorce makes you unwilling to get together.

Your new life is beginning; you are going to be master of your world. In small steps and safe situations put your needs first. Utter your opinions, beliefs, and feelings without apology. Slowly expand your comfort zone. The more you practice this, the easier it will get.

Your sister-in-law and her mother can huff and puff all they want, but they are not entitled to take advantage of you. No, they aren't. Not by the hair on your chinny-chin-chin.

Wayne & Tamara

Logical Conclusion

A year ago I met a girl, and we got so interested in each other we thought we would marry. She needed attention and care, and I gave it to her. Now it seems our relationship is not working anymore, and she is unwilling to go forward. What can I do to persuade her to be with me? Please tell me specific things I should do to help this relationship survive. She means everything to me.

Ely

Ely, if we could tell you how to get this girl, we could tell a girl you wouldn't consider dating how to get you. Authentic relationships don't work that way. Marriages which thrive are ones both parties enter freely. In those marriages each party wants nothing more than to be with the other.

When your understanding advances from "what I want" to "how this works," you will be grateful for her refusal.





Sunny Portugal in May

Common Sense Health – Diana Gifford-Jones

Are you ready for an unconventional health recommendation? Because it's my opinion that living life well is about more than routines, day in and day out. It's also about stepping out of them. Let's put a little adventure on your calendar. In that spirit, I'd like to invite you to pack a suitcase, clear your mind, and join me in Portugal this coming May.

What better way to achieve a host of good things? New friends, great food, astounding scenery, and conversations that have us learning, laughing, and living!

To make it happen, I've partnered with Collette, one of North America's most respected guided tour companies. I'm now assembling a group of Gifford-Jones readers for an unforgettable tour through Portugal. The arrangements, accommodations and sightseeing will be professionally handled; the conversations, friendships and discoveries will be ours to share.

Portugal beckons. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's famous line asked, "How do I love thee?", and the answer is, "Let me count the ways." For starters, there's the food. Portuguese cuisine has all the pleasures of a Mediterranean diet. Fresh fish, olive oil, garden vegetables, beans, and fruit are woven into ultra-healthy meals.

UNESCO recognized the Mediterranean Diet as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. What does that mean? There is an emphasis on communal meals as the cornerstone of social customs and celebrations. Eating well is a way of life and it is done together. Growing and preparing food, utilizing seasonal staples, passing culinary knowledge between generations, and gathering around the table are respected traditions. Eating together, UNESCO observes, is fundamental to the social identity and continuity of Mediterranean communities.

Companionship therefore will be a hallmark of the trip. Because it's good for all of us! People who are meaningfully connected to others live longer. In an analysis of 148 studies involving more than 308,000 people, those with stronger social relationships had 50 per cent greater odds of survival than those with weaker connections. The participants were followed for an average of 7.5 years, and most studies examined death from any cause. Simply living with someone wasn't enough to produce the same result. What mattered most was active social integration – being involved, having relationships, participating and belonging.

We know loneliness is not an emotional inconvenience. It's a major risk factor for declining physical health. If you'd like to make new friends, there's no better way than to engage in sustained, meaningful experiences together.

We also learn about Portugal's history, culture, and artisans. But I want to focus on Portugal's remarkable public health story. Following the Carnation Revolution of 1974, the country underwent major social and healthcare reforms. Its National Health Service was established in 1979. Infant mortality, which stood at approximately 84 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1960, fell to fewer than three by 2024. This transformation reflects decades of improvements in immunization, healthcare access and living conditions.

Today, Portuguese life expectancy is approximately 82.7 years, about one year above the European Union average.

Among the benefits of a Gifford-Jones-inspired trip to Portugal is the regular cocktail hour. You'll get no beef from me for enjoying dinner with the wonderful local wines too!

It will be special to travel with fellow readers who share an interest in this column. We will tell stories about challenging conventional advice, discuss the health issues that matter as we grow older, and find humour as frequently as possible.

Don't wait until you have the perfect time to travel. Don't assume that there will always be another opportunity. And don't underestimate the value of doing something new and special with good company.



Dead and Gone...

The Mail at the Door

By Gary Payne, MBA

When I was growing up in Etobicoke, my brother and I used to wait for the mailman. I can't remember exactly what we were expecting half the time.nSometimes it was a letter from a relative who lived far away. Other times,nwe were just curious about what he might bring.

He was always friendly. He'd stop and chat with my mother for a few minutes, ask how things were going, and then carry on to the next house. It was such an ordinary part of growing up that nobody thought much about it.

Back then, the mailman and the garbage man were familiar faces in just about every neighbourhood. As kids, we knew who they were. They were simply part of everyday life.

This Monday, Etobicoke is among the first communities in Toronto scheduled to begin losing door-to-door mail delivery. Some 18,000 homes are affected. Ajax and Pickering are scheduled to follow in 2027, with millions moreCanadian households eventually making the switch to community mailboxes.

According to Canada Post's own annual report, the average Canadian household received seven letters a week in 2006. Last year, it was two. We didn't just lose the mailman. We stopped sending him anything to deliver.

We pay our bills online. Birthday greetings arrive by text. Family photographs appear instantly on our phones. Even Christmas cards, once a fixture of December, seem to arrive less frequently every year.

Canada Post lost $1.57 billion last year. According to its annual report, delivering mail to an individual address costs an average of $284 annually, compared with $162 at a community mailbox.

Canada Post tried something similar in 2013, converting about 100,000 households before the program was halted two years later. A decade later, there are fewer letters and an even bigger financial problem.

For some seniors and people with disabilities, however, getting to a community mailbox isn't easy. Canada Post offers accommodations, including weekly home delivery for those who qualify. That's important, and something worth holding them to. And none of this is the fault of the letter carriers. They're watching a familiar part of their working lives disappear, too. I haven't had mail delivered to my own front door in years. Like so many Canadians, I've grown accustomed to walking to a mailbox. It's convenient enough. I don't particularly miss the service.

But I do miss what it represented. There was a time when children recognized the man coming up the walk and wondered what news he might be bringing. My brother and I weren't really waiting for the mail. We were waiting for what might be inside.