

Waking Up the Nation,
One Reader at a Time...

PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

Perks From A Pistol Packin' Grandma



by *Harriet Bishop*

Peace on Earth.....ahhhh. Wish it were so. It seems wars have always plagued humanity from time immemorial. Wars alter lives of peaceful people who don't even want to fight. It was true in antiquity, and it's still true now. "Deployment" was recently coined, but it was part of our lives even as we grew up in the Great Depression, with our boyfriends landing on the shores of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and our brothers landing on Normandy beachheads. Anguish and joblessness are not new either.

It was early May of 1951 when I stood awestruck, squinting at the brightness of the white sugary sand. Newlyweds as well as new arrivals from Tucson, my husband and I had just been uprooted from our fledgling teaching and coaching positions at the University of Arizona, even before the end of the Spring semester, due to the escalating Korean War.

The letter we had received at our cozy cottage was written in military jargon, full of such cryptic abbreviations that we had to take it to the nearby air base for interpretation. An ex-fighter pilot from WW II, my husband was being recalled into service as a 2nd Lieutenant to be retrained as an aircraft controller. He was ordered to report to Panama City by next Friday, ready for duty! Down at the equator? No, on Florida's

Panhandle. " Whew! I get to go too. "

Feathers flew as we notified our superiors (no 3 weeks' notice when Uncle Sam calls!), cancelled our lease, arranged for the military to pack and store our piano and wedding silver indefinitely, said goodbye to my stunned parents, sold our horse and returned the horse trailer to his family ranch at Dalhart, Texas.

We made our way into East Texas before there were any freeways, marveling that two lane Highway 90 narrowed to one lane bridges! And marveling too that there was water under those bridges, quite an unusual sight for desert dwellers!

We were delayed two days waiting in a sleepy, humid café with flies buzzing around the screen door, the ceiling fan creaking overhead. Our 1947 Chevy had broken down in Houma, Louisiana, requiring

extensive repair. The shop wouldn't take a personal check, we didn't have sufficient cash, and there was no such thing as a credit card. When our Tucson bank finally opened the next day, a phone call solved the sticky problem.

So now we had arrived at the white sand of Long Beach at Panama City only a few miles from our final destination, Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida. The quiet surf lapped and murmured as the foam bubbles broke, and the waves receded back into the deep turquoise ocean. Such bliss and peace after a frantic rush to get here.

But there was something strange dotted all along that beach. About fifty feet apart stood wooden platforms slightly larger than a card table with 4x4's for legs, but they were only 6 or 7 inches off the ground. What in the world was

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their purpose? I pondered this for months as we visited often to use the high bar for chin-ups, and to run along the sand to the distant pier and back, falling gratefully into the clear blue salty ocean to rest afloat. Eventually we were again "deployed", this time to Japan-and three years later we returned to Tyndall AFB with our three babies, ages 1, 2, and 3. As children do, they loved the beach and grew up sturdy, climbing up on the little platforms and jumping down into the soft warm sand. Still the little platforms puzzled me, and their true purpose remained elusive.

The ensuing years took us to bases in Nebraska, Detroit, and another overseas deployment, this time in Europe. Upon returning from Germany on our way to San Antonio, we brought our teens and our two new toddlers to play on our favorite white sand beach. Now at last I knew what the little platforms were! I had to become older and wiser before I realized that the little structures were shelters from the sun which had been overwhelmed by the force of storms piling up

the sand beneath them, making them unrecognizable and unusable for their former purpose. They were rendered truly useless.

The shifting sands, long neglected, had now formed dunes too big and too expensive to combat. The builder hadn't counted on the entire shape of the beach landscape being altered forever.

And so it is with our lives.....our human bodies were built for action. But the storms of life and stresses of chronic illness can "pile up the sand" to overwhelm us, keep us from fulfilling our true potential, keep us from achieving our goals and from performing at our best....How can we keep it from overwhelming us and rendering us useless?

We must keep "digging out the sand", and doing the best we can to remain recognizable to ourselves. Chronic illness often slows us down necessarily. Some days we can't get out of bed...and shouldn't. And we never know what day that will be. At those times we can be kind to ourselves and allow ourselves to rest, knowing in our hearts that we still have our souls, our tal-

ents, our ambitions and our true purpose intact. We'll know for sure that we will go into action, "digging out the sand", taking small steps toward our goals just as soon as our bodies allow it, to ensure that our purpose will never be obscured like the useless little platforms. By consciously avoiding neglect, and by taking excellent care of ourselves, we won't allow chronic illness to alter our personal landscapes forever. *pha*