

The pigs are out, and other causes for concern

By Janet Sheridan Special to The Denver Post



In the spring, as we drove across Kansas, my husband muttered to himself, “Now a school bus is passing me. Am I that old?” Later, at a rest area, we switched places so Joel could nap, and I drove 50 miles with the left turn signal blinking.

Yes, we’re that old.

Mental lapses have begun to dot my life the way Starbucks dot the universe. I recently acknowledged a lady by name then realized I didn’t know her; I also missed an appointment written in capital letters and underlined on my calendar. Two days later, I couldn’t find the cup of coffee I’d poured until Joel asked why I’d put it in the refrigerator, an innocent query that caused me to lose my sense of humor as well.

Then, one night I woke up in a panic after dreaming the pigs were out and I needed to call Joel so he could round them up. But I couldn’t remember his cellphone number no matter how many times I thumped my head. Even after awakening, I needed a few minutes of total concentration to remember those seven digits I know as well as my name. By then, the pigs had disappeared.

I tell myself I have these lapses because I know more than I did when young. In my prime, I imagined my brain as a sleek computer, which quickly scanned for and found anything I requested. But now, years later, after stuffing my head with a lifetime’s accumulation of knowledge, experiences, names and nonsense, I see my brain as an exhausted librarian who’s looked after everything I’ve sent her since the day I was born. Crotchety and overworked, she grumbles as she totters here and there on swollen ankles, searching for bits of knowledge she tucked away years ago. Sometimes it takes the poor old dear weeks to stumble across the information I need.

So, aware of the aged equipment I’m working with, I fret when I can’t remember alphabetical order or Craig’s zip code. Not being able to find my toothbrush or my hiking boots irritates me beyond reason; and carefully checking the refrigerator before going to the store, then coming home with a half-gallon of milk to go with the two we already have tips me over the edge.

Really, I’m worried about both Joel and me.

Awhile back, I walked inside on a sunny afternoon carrying a carton that contained a new vacuum I decided to assemble before starting dinner — a decision that nearly unhinged me. My troubles began with a ne’er-do-well formatter with 20/20 eyesight who chose a tiny gray font for the vacuum’s manual. Though I was wearing my glasses, I had to turn on the overhead light, stand by a window and squint to read the assembly instructions, which, evidently, I did poorly because I spent five minutes trying to connect the suction hose to the circled insignia on top of the sweeper.

After several such missteps, I finally managed to assemble the vacuum and take it for a trial run. Its easy movement and quiet hum impressed me, but I didn’t like the way it tried to eat the area rugs. When I bent double to peer at the teeny-tiny setting labels to see if I’d set the sweeper too low, my upside-down

position caused my glasses to fall off, and I discovered I'd been wearing my extra-dark sun glasses during the entire, miserable experience.

A short time later, Joel walked into the house talking on his cellphone. When he saw me, he held his hand over the mouthpiece and hissed, "Janet, have you seen my phone? I can't find it!"

We shouldn't be allowed to live on our own.

Janet Sheridan's book, "A Seasoned Life Lived in Small Towns," is available on Amazon. She writes from Craig, and blogs at auntbeulah.com.