

Don't Worry And Be Happy, Especially On Planet X

I'm not usually one to worry, but according to the U.S. Government, more people are killed by pigs each year than by sharks. Even though pigs outnumber people by over 5 to 1 in Iowa, I don't encounter them much more often than I encounter sharks, so I'm not going to worry about either one.

But you might. We all tend to worry too much, and usually about the wrong things. Worse, some people are happy only when they are worried, and start to worry about the fact that nothing is worrying them.

For example, I'm a member of the Eastern Iowa Brass Band, and a week ago we played an outdoor concert in Lowden (that's in Iowa) for its sesquicentennial celebration. The night before, some of our band members were engaged in our usual pre-concert preparations at a bar in Mount Vernon (the one in Iowa), and Beth - one of the cornet players - was worried.

"What if it rains tomorrow," she said, "Where will we play?"

"Don't worry," I told her, "I looked at the weather forecast this evening and it's going to be a beautiful day."

"Maybe," she replied, "but what if it does rain? Do we have a plan for that?"

I thought about it for a moment and said, "What if space aliens come down tonight and abduct half of our members to become sex slaves on Planet X? Do we need a plan for that?"

Actually, in that scenario we would more likely need a plan to rescue the space aliens.

The moral of this story is that it's way easier to worry too much about something than not enough. Although I believe that Proper Prior Planning Prevents Piss-Poor Performance (the 7 Ps), enough is often too much.

I'm from the "If it happens, it happens" school of defeatist ideology. If there's nothing I can do to prevent something bad from happening, damned if I'm going to spend any time worrying about it.

Oddly enough, if you type "defeatist ideology" into the Google search engine, it helpfully replies, "Did you mean "*leftist ideology*"? You have to give the rightists credit for somehow associating leftists with defeatism, but I digress.

One of the things I have recently chosen not to worry about is the possibility of a UI department being renamed Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield ("this is not an ad") College of Public Health.

In 2002, I wrote a column about the hysteria surrounding the proposal to rename the UI College of Medicine to "Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine", in recognition of a mere \$63 million donation. It seemed like the Carver name was everywhere.

I created imaginary quotes from then-UI President Mary Sue Carver-Coleman and the mayor of Carverville (formerly Coralville). There were fictitious programs with silly acronyms, like Carver-Hawkeye Undergraduate Music Program (C.H.U.M.P.) and the Carver-Hawkeye Institute for Mexican-Iowan Cuisine; Habaneras, Apertivos and Nacho/Guacamole Applications (C.H.I.M.I.C.H.A.N.G.A.).

If I had a point at that time, it was that naming rights is just the way things work in the world of high-stakes fundraising and not to get too worked up about it. The prospect of U of I Community Credit Union possibly changing its name to Optiva recently didn't scorch my shorts, either.

Now that I think about it, there is very little that I get excited about, unless it affects me directly. To affect me directly, an issue would figuratively need to fly through an open window in my house and poop on my head as I sit watching TV in my Barcalounger.

This kind of passive detachment is not necessarily a good thing, especially with regard to distant and less-tangible things like famines, genocides and wars. Those are all very distressing, but if I can't do anything (or anything more) about them, I don't believe in hand-wringing.

It seems like many important issues don't seem to be pooping on my head with sufficient volume to really grab my attention these days, so there's a temptation to worry about dumb stuff like whether or not the prescription drug being hyped by the TV commercial I'm watching will cure the disease I don't know I have.

You're probably not much different in that regard, so here's my advice to you – take it easy. Don't squander your emotional energy with unnecessary worrying. Instead, consider joining me in more positive and constructive pursuits, like trying to figure out how to become a sex slave on Planet X.