

## **BRAVE AND DUMB: TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN**

*Marsha Henry Goff*

Someone once gave me a mug with my name on it: “MARSHA,” it says in big green letters, “Meaning: BRAVE.” The short poem that follows says I am “dauntless and daring” and that I “have no fear.”

Yeah, right! Tell that to the Guthrie, Oklahoma pharmacist who witnessed my panic when the tornado sirens sounded while my aunt was pondering which brand of laxative to purchase. Or to our fellow tourists who thought I was never going to get up the nerve to descend from the pyramid at Chitzen-Itza. (I finally managed it by holding onto a safety chain as I bounced down the steep steps on my posterior.)

My husband exhibited bravery simply by sitting through the chick-flick “Beaches.” Just before the lights dimmed, Ray looked around the theater and said in horror, “There’s only one other guy in here!” Is anything more terrifying for a man than sharing close quarters with a couple hundred sobbing women? I think not!

Many years ago, at an Oklahoma farm pond where his family was fishing, my friend Don performed his bravest act when he used a small tackle box to knock a tarantula off his young son’s neck. That was back when most folks—uneducated in the ways of arachnids—thought a bite from a tarantula was fatal.

Dean was sitting in a lawn chair when Don noticed a tarantula the size of a turtle covering the back of his firstborn’s neck. When the tarantula kept retreating down Dean’s back instead of hopping onto the hand Don proffered in a selfless effort to save his son, Don went to his car to get the tackle box.

The bravest male that day may have been Dean, not Don, because—knowing his dad carried a small handgun in the tackle box to dispatch venomous snakes—Dean presumed that Don planned to shoot (a la John Wayne) the spider off his neck. Though pale as a ghost, Dean sat still as a stone as he cautioned in a quavering voice, “D-d-don’t s-s-shoot me, Dad!”

Ray, Jr.’s (aka Butch) bravery may have peaked at the age of three. Deathly afraid of a ghoulish TV character named Gregory Graves who introduced horror movies, Butch—caught in a squatting position when a promo featuring Graves came on television—duck-walked at the speed of light out of the living room. A few minutes later, his aunt went into a dark bedroom and began yelling, “Help! Gregory Graves has hold of my leg!” Though screaming hysterically himself, Butch raced to the rescue, grabbed Lesta’s hand and tried to pull her away from the horrifying bogeyman.

My own bravest act—drinking a bottle of pop—pales in comparison to Butch’s valiant feat. While visiting Grams in her small town, the boys and I accompanied her to the home of a sweet old man whom she served as guardian. I had known Bruce since I was a little girl when he would drive to Grams’ house in his antique Model-T Ford and allow my sisters and me to stand on the car’s running boards and cling to the doors while he took us for a slow ride down the road.

He was old then, but by the time he required a guardian, he was ancient! Unaccustomed to guests, he bustled about his home—the one he had built himself—making us comfortable and trying hard to be a perfect host. While the boys were playing outside, Grams and Bruce discussed business. Suddenly, Bruce looked at me and said, “Do you like pop?”

“Sure,” I replied.

Bruce shuffled into an adjacent room and came back with a bottle of pop, make that HALF a bottle of unrefrigerated Coca-Cola, which he handed to me. I looked at the bottle—God knows how long it had been opened or whether he had poured the missing Coke into a glass or simply drank it from the bottle—and then I looked at Bruce. I can still see him in my mind’s eye: sparse white-hair framing a wrinkled face which bore a proud smile that he was able to give me something I liked. It was obvious that he planned to stand in front of me, bobbing his head up and down in approval, until I drank the pop.

So I did. It was my bravest act. And probably one of my dumbest!