

From the President

Justice for Gary

Jenny Powell, M.D.

Near the end of September 2021, the wooded area across the street from my Osage Beach, Missouri, office began to be cut down. Today, in mid-January 2022, stick construction is almost complete on a building that will become a hardware store. There has been no sign of Gary for months now.

Let me back up.

We moved our office to its current location in February 2020. The front entrance to our suite is at the rear of our two-story professional condominium, and the lightly wooded area was across the street, right off Highway 54 in Osage Beach, heart of the Lake of the Ozarks. The lake was formed in 1929 by damming the Osage River for hydroelectric power. The lake was meant for recreation, with more than 1,000 miles of shoreline with fishing, cabins, and shopping. The visitors' bureau calls it "the Midwest's premier lake resort destination."

While the Lake of the Ozarks, affectionately known as the "Magic Dragon," has indeed been voted the top recreational lake in the U.S. by readers of *USA Today*, and there ARE cabins, and there IS a lot of fishing done here, it is difficult to find any spots along the lake that have not been filled with various construction projects. Lake homes, condominiums, and resorts litter the coastline, the docks of which sometimes make it difficult to navigate some watercraft between them in the many little coves. I wonder whether a person who runs out of beer on one side of the cove might be able to simply reach out and get a can from a neighbor across the way.

When we moved our office here from a spot down the road, because of the proximity of the tiny, wooded areas, we were inundated with wildlife, all of which my nurse, Kirsten, felt compelled to name. The bird who had made a nest in the eave near our employee entrance is named Sally. The lizard is Larry (who may have been female, because it was quite large about the middle), and then there was a smaller lizard (who clearly was not Larry) named Lizzie. Three hummingbirds were also named: Henry, Helga, and Heidi. There was Gretchen, the tail-less cat. And then, there was Gary, the groundhog.

Gary would be seen in various places, but the wooded area across from the building was his (her?) favorite. One of us would spot Gary standing on his (her?) haunches, looking about or chewing on a blade of something or other and alert the staff. Then as one we would rush to the window of my office, overlooking the area, and watch as Gary either bounded over the tiny hills between the trees to find more to eat, or do whatever groundhogs do. One day, Gary was seen staring in our employee entrance door. Sally (the sparrow) probably told him (her?) that he (she?) had a fan club of sorts and he (she?) was willing to sign autographs. Whatever his intention, Gary fast became our favorite of all the woodland creatures.

Thus it was that in September 2021, when bulldozers came out and began knocking down the trees in the wooded area across from our office, Gary was seen in the grassy median

that splits the dead end that is Palisades Boulevard. I saw Gary staring at his once beautiful feeding grounds with what really appeared to be confusion. He waddled closer, under the only tree in the median, at the devastation of his playground. I watched as he (she?) stood on his (her?) hind feet, facing the now treeless lot. I then watched as Gary the Groundhog ran back to hide in the drainage sewer.

We haven't seen Gary since.

As the wood was cleared and stumps removed, as the ground was worked (and worked, and worked—my goodness, how much leveling do they really have to do?), and the big trucks tore up Palisades Boulevard (never intended to handle so much heavy equipment traffic), we always had something new to stare at through the windows as ever so slowly, construction work eventually began.

A few times we were tempted to put up "Justice for Gary" signs, but we knew that that would only bring confusion and never make the evening news. At Christmas, Kirsten was given a stuffed groundhog toy, which she promptly named Gary. This Gary the Groundhog (who is incredibly easy to maintain, as he sits on Kirsten's desk—no, correction: as he stands on Kirsten's desk) need not be concerned about his vanishing homeland. And I as I watch from my office typing this, I hear the Joni Mitchell song "Big Yellow Taxi" playing in my head.

They paved paradise

Put up a parking lot

With a pink hotel, a boutique

And a swinging hot spot

Don't it always seem to go

That you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone?

In March 2020, I was sent an article by a well-educated patient about the promise of an old, well-known and well-used medication called hydroxychloroquine in preventing severe disease with infection of SARS-CoV-2 virus. We dispense from our office, and I know this medication, know how to use it, and have had little (if any) issues with the drug. I suggested that Kirsten order us a goodly supply of the medication I was then using to treat rheumatoid and other inflammatory arthroses. So, she did. Two weeks later, there was not only an edict from the Missouri Department of Insurance and the Department of Pharmacy, but also from the physician-licensing board, the Board of Healing Arts, that the only diagnoses allowed for the dispensing of hydroxychloroquine shall be in SLE ("lupus") or rheumatoid arthritis and that it should NOT be dispensed to patients in the throes of COVID-19.

Nearly two years and hundreds of dispensed prescriptions later, I have had ZERO patients go on to need hospitalization if treated early enough, zero complications from five days' worth of a prescription for the drug, and zero deaths in those who have been treated at all. Our only death (thus far) was accomplished in the hospital on a ventilator following

hospital's administration of an antiviral, and he had severe underlying autoimmune disorder maintained on a steroid regimen before he became ill with COVID-19.

On behalf of my patients, I am eternally grateful for the patient who sent me that article in March 2020, because I believe that many lives have been preserved because of it. Would those folks have gone on to develop the cytokine storm? I cannot say. But I only know that that article led me to do research, and research demonstrates how medications may contain miracles within them, that repurposed drugs, once their actions and potential actions are given the right conditions, can lead to successful healing of the body through its own innate abilities.

As 2020 turned into 2021, there were several issues with supply of multiple medications, those which we used for a variety of purposes, and I had to learn to be flexible with different treatments for multiple diagnoses. My concern about the supply of raw materials for generic medications, much of which comes from China, grew, and I was faced with the possibility of a supply issue with ALL medications.

What would happen if I could not get my patients ANY of the life-saving medications I currently prescribed? I wondered what others in different careers would do if faced with such a dilemma? I could not speak for some, but I knew what Phil Jackson would do, and that would surely work for me and mine. Phil Jackson, the winning basketball coach, would go back to fundamentals. In our profession, fellow physicians, fundamentals would come from Hippocrates, quoted as having said, "Let food be thy medicine and thy medicine be thy food."

I found there was an offering for a nearly year-long class, meeting virtually, titled "The Foundations of Herbalism," and I sensed Phil Jackson saying, "Jenny, go for it." What's the worst that could happen? Well, Phil, the worst that could happen is that the entire supply chain collapses and I won't have any way of treating my patients. Unless the answer came from the environment around me.

This course taught me, literally from the ground up: what types of soil the 60 herbs we studied required, how to identify the plants, how to harvest the plants, what part of the plant was used (and for what), the energetics of the herbs, how to put together an herbal formula, and how to process the herbs and make them into "medicines." I was not at all surprised to find that many of our pharmaceuticals are synthetic versions of what is found in nature.

So—how does this relate to Gary? What makes man different from the groundhog? I would say it's that we eat better and use toilets. But also I would venture to say that we are able to adapt to our environment.

I don't know whether we will ever see Gary again. We like to think that he (she?) is hibernating somewhere and will reappear sometime in March, not with Punxsutawney Phil but in the tiny, wooded area on the backside of our building come spring. However, if he doesn't, we may yet put up a sign facing the new hardware store.

Justice for Gary!

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