

EXCERPTS FROM:

Husbands, Hot Flashes, and All That Hullabaloo!
Menopausal Musings from a Midlife Mama

Dueling Dieters

By Vicky DeCoster

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"Honey," my husband said as he walked into the kitchen one morning. "I think the scale is broken. It said I weigh three pounds more than I should."

"Let me check it out," I answered as I quickly walked into our bathroom and stepped on the scale. "You're right!" I exclaimed. "I'm five pounds over myself!" I immediately drove to the store, bought a new scale and brought it home to test out.

I hopped on first. "Hmm," I grumbled, "This is weird. It *still* says I'm five pounds over." I stepped off and kicked the side of the scale. I stepped back on with just one foot and balanced with the expertise of a professional ballerina.

"Let me try," my husband said as he pulled me off, "Maybe it just needs some adjusting." He stepped on the scale and sighed. "Two faulty scales in one morning? Of all the bad luck!"

I looked at him. "I think the only thing that needs adjusting is our portions."

With that said, we began our new life as middle-aged dueling dieters with metabolisms that have been absent from our bodies for so long they should be listed as "missing" on the side of a milk carton.

The first day of our diet went terrific. The egg white and banana shake I made each of us for breakfast provided us with just enough protein and potassium to fill us up for exactly 12 minutes. As a result, lunchtime arrived a little earlier than usual. By mid-morning, we had each eaten a small salad with two ounces of tuna and lemon juice dressing.

"This is delicious!" my husband exclaimed as he licked the salad plate clean, "And I've only consumed 650 calories today so far!" By 3:00, we had finished a lovely dinner of four ounces of broiled chicken breast, broccoli spears and dry spinach leaves.

I rubbed my stomach, "I'm not even hungry *at all!*"

At 6:00 p.m., my husband looked at me and said, "Ready to turn in? After all, there's no point in staying up late anymore if we can't snack, is there?" We went to bed. I had a dream I was chewing on my pillow and it tasted like a hot fudge sundae. When I woke up the next morning, my pillow was in shreds and some of the shreds were missing.

"Darn," I muttered to myself, "I wonder how many calories are in 300-thread count pillowcases?" I glanced over at my husband who was still sleeping. He was feasting on his arm like it was a chicken drumstick.

By the third week of our diet, things were getting a little shaky. There had been lots of small and boring portions endured without the reward of significant weight loss. We had returned three more scales. After dinner one night, my husband got up from the couch. "I'm going to the convenience store to put gas in your car," he said.

"But you just put gas in my car last night," I retorted as he put his shoes on.

"I'll be right back," he hastily answered as he ran out the door. A few minutes later, he returned with a smile broader than my hips.

"How's it going, honey bunny?" he asked sweetly.

"Let me smell your breath," I demanded.

"There's no need to smell my breath," he said, "I've done nothing wrong." Then he grinned.

"Your teeth are covered in Oreo cookie crumbs!" I shouted.

"So!" he yelled back, "I can't survive on bean sprout sandwiches and rice cakes for the rest of my life. A man needs his meat and potatoes or he'll dry up and blow away and then who will water the yard and kill big bugs for you?" He had a point.

"I'm just going to get a drink of water," I announced. I felt his eyes following me into the kitchen as I reached in the cupboard for a glass. He turned back to the television and I tried to quietly unwrap the piece of candy I had hidden inside a coffee cup. It was like trying to unwrap candy during communion in church. The neighbors two houses down heard me.

Suddenly, my husband was standing behind me. "Open your mouth," he demanded.

"I don't want to," I whimpered, "It's just a caramel nib."

"They're called caramel *nips!*" he shouted, "Like *Nipsey* Russell!" I quickly started chewing my candy. He bellowed, "Stop that chewing. You're making me hungry again!"

When the caramel in my mouth finally melted and my teeth unstuck from each other, I sat my husband down on the couch. "Tell me again why we're dieting? I forgot and I'm too delirious from hunger to think rationally."

"I don't know," he answered as he put his head in his hands. "The only place I've lost inches is from my ear cartilage."

"I lost half an inch from my big toe," I gloomily added, "But I think it was muscle."

"Your big toe looks great," he complimented.

"Really?" I brightened up. "I think your skinny ear lobes really thin out your face."

"Oh stop," he glowed.

"You have a spinach leaf in your tooth," I said as I lovingly scraped it off his enamel.

"Honey," my husband started, "I think we should ..."

"Ssh," I replied as I put one finger over his sticky Oreo-coated lips, "I know. Let's just accept our bodies for what they are and stop this silly diet." We stood up and embraced. "I love you just the way you are," I whispered near his lean ear lobe. He placed his big toes on top of mine. "Careful," I warned with a smile, "They're so petite now, they may not be able to handle the extra weight."

And so we came to a silent agreement that night as I held on tightly to his love handles and he firmly grasped my broad hips – a scale could never weigh the importance of unconditional love.

Wilderness Wienie
By Vicky DeCoster
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After several summers of vacationing in northern Minnesota, I now know the real reason why the pioneer women died so young: they all had to share a one-room cabin with their families and pretend they enjoyed living that way. The very thought of it gives me a clogged artery, an irregular heartbeat, and a terminal diagnosis.

Don't get me wrong, it's not that I don't love my family. It's just that five days in a 12x12-foot room furnished with a hot plate, one couch, two beds, four people and a shower so small that I accidentally shut off the water with my *derrière* every time I bend over to shave my legs is a bit too much togetherness for me.

The pioneer ladies would call me a wilderness wienie. And I'd retort with, "Have you ever slept in the same room with a husband who snores like a buzz saw, a son who yells out in his sleep, "KERPLUNK!" and a daughter (a.k.a., Ratchet Jaws) who grinds her teeth so hard that it sounds as if she's either chewing on gravel or an ear of field corn?"

After two nights trying to sleep with Ratchet Jaws an arm's-length away from Buzz Saw Boy and me just close enough to smother with my pillow, I began wondering why anyone sold a pioneer a gun. Weren't they afraid of friendly fire? I don't even want to think about the chain of events that might have occurred if a pioneer wife got a little cranky during the long winter she was stuck in that tiny cabin with five other people with nothing else to wear but a dirty dress and a bonnet that unfortunately shaped her hair in a style that closely resembled a football helmet

The sounds of "CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH ... KERPLUNK ... AND ZZZZZZZZZZZ!" suddenly transported me back to reality and the land of sleep deprivation. I sighed and pulled my sleeping bag outside to the cabin deck and lay there, ready to enjoy peace and quiet at last. Moments later, I heard "HOOO, HOOO! RIBBET, RIBBET! SCRATCH, SCRATCH!" I knew what the HOOO, HOOO and the RIBBET, RIBBET was, but what was the SCRATCH, SCRATCH? I carefully lifted my sleeping bag and saw the face of a ground squirrel looking back at me.

"AAAAHHHHH!" I screamed as I ran back into the cabin, slamming the deck door behind me and leaving the ground squirrel to chew up my sleeping bag, make a nest, and deliver 300 baby ground squirrels by morning.

Ratchet Jaws and Buzz Saw Boy immediately woke up. As Ratchet Jaws spit out the powder in her hand that used to be two teeth, she asked, "What's wrong, Mom?"

"Yeah, honey, can't you sleep?" asked Buzz Saw Boy.

Young Yeller stretched and yawned and said, "What are you doing up, Mom?"

"BECAUSE I CAN'T SLEEP WITH ANY OF YOU PEOPLE ANYMORE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE!" I yelled like a lunatic about to run into the woods naked, never to be seen again.

"Gee, someone is a little crabby, isn't she?" Buzz Saw Boy commented to Ratchet Jaws and Young Yeller. Oh, they wanted crabby? I could really give them crabby, but since we were on vacation, I decided to go easy on them. I quietly searched in my suitcase until I found the three bandanas I had planned on using for a makeshift rope to lower myself from the deck to the ground in case I needed to make a hasty retreat from all that togetherness. Instead, I tied one on top of the other on my head, cinching them all beneath my chin. It wasn't a bonnet, but it would have to do.

I stretched out in the bed next to Buzz Saw Boy and waited for everyone to go back to sleep. I still heard the "CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH ... KERPLUNK ... and ZZZZZZZZZZ!" sounds, but at 350 decibels lower than I had earlier. As I drifted off to sleep, I realized that those pioneer women weren't wearing bonnets to keep their ears warm or because bonnets were the latest fashion rage – they were wearing them to muffle the snores, the yells, and the teeth grinding from their beloved family members.

I wish I could end this story with a happy ending for the pioneer women. Unfortunately, just when they thought they had everything under control by wearing the bonnets, their husbands invited their aging mother-in-laws to live with them in that tiny one-room cabin. The pioneer women sighed and said, "I can deal with this ... I know I can." But wouldn't you know it? The mother-in-law sleepwalked ... and she liked to sleep naked to boot. There's just only so much shock a pioneer woman can take in the middle of the night.

And that my friends is the real reason why the pioneer women died so young.

Feeling My Way

By Vicky DeCoster

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As I sat in the eye doctor's office awaiting my yearly examination, my son was reading out loud to me from a brochure he found next to our seats. "Dear Doctor, I've had good vision all my life, but since I turned 40, everything looks blurry. Can you help me?"

Ah, I had just experienced one of those glorious moments when I felt like I wasn't walking alone on the path to old age.

"Keep reading," I said to my son.

He sighed. "Mom, I'm tired. Why can't you read this yourself?"

I shouted defensively, "I'M STILL ENJOYING AN ACTIVE LIFE ... IT'S JUST THAT I CAN'T SEE WHAT I'M ENJOYING ANYMORE!"

Lately, I'm finding out the hard way that vision really changes after age 40. When I started researching how my vision actually works, I discovered that the human eye is composed of several parts that must work together, and that three things are needed for proper vision – eyes, a brain, and light.

I figured two out of three isn't a bad ratio when you think about it. I've got the eyes and the light ... and the brain is just in the beginning stages of dementia, so things aren't looking too hopeless at this point.

"Mrs. DeCoster," the eye doctor called me back to the examining room. I felt my way to the chair in the darkened room and sat down. "They should turn on some lights in here," I muttered, "There's more lighting in the Leopard Lounge down the street."

The doctor ignored me and said, "I'll need to dilate your pupils now," as she filled my eyes with drops. She left the room. I sat there and stared at the eye charts and watched the letters change into fuzzy shapes that I swear spelled out, "You Are Really Old."

A few minutes later, my pupils were so enlarged that my face now closely resembled the face of a fly. The doctor popped back in the room and said, "Wonderful!" as she gazed into my eyes. "I have a three-dimensional view of your optic nerve and retina!"

I thought to myself, "Well, I have a three-dimensional view of your nostril hairs right now, but I'm not going to get *that* excited about it."

She pulled the huge eyeglasses over my eyes and said, "Number 1 or Number 2?"

I didn't have to go to the bathroom, but I answered, "Number 1."

She moved the lenses around several times and said again, "Number 1 or Number 2?"

"Didn't you just ask me that?" I inquired.

"We're just checking out what works best for your eyes right now," she answered cheerfully. "Now, Number 1 or Number 2?"

"Go back to Number 1," I requested. She moved it back. "Go back to Number 2," I said.

We went back and forth like that several times until she said impatiently, "Just pick a number ... any number!"

"Number 2," I said meekly.

She moved the lenses one last time and said, "Now, how does everything look?"

I felt my left eye rolling around in its socket, but I lied and said, "Looks great!"

"Let's check your vision for reading," she said.

I think I heard a bell toll somewhere in the background, but I answered, "Okay."

She held a book in front of me. "Can you read the first line?" she asked.

I squinted and requested, "Can you move back a little bit?" She stepped back. "A little further." She stepped back some more. "A tiny bit more," I asked.

A few steps later, and she backed into the wall on the opposite side of the room. She yelled, "CAN YOU READ IT NOW?"

"YES!" I shouted, "IT SAYS 'IF YOU CAN ONLY READ THIS FROM ACROSS THE ROOM, YOU NEED READING GLASSES!'"

Dejected, I headed home that day with crossed, rolling, really big eyeballs and a prescription for new quadruple-focal lenses clutched in my sweaty hand.

Not long after my appointment, my friend Judi told me how she was riding in a car on a precarious road alongside a cliff in California with a friend. Needing to look away from the side of the road where she envisioned their car plunging off with one wrong move, Judi glanced over at her friend who was driving. She gasped.

Her friend, who had to leave on vacation before filling her new eyeglass prescription, was wearing three pairs of glasses – one rested on the bottom of her nose, one in the middle, and one at the bridge.

Judi said, "What are you doing with all those pairs of glasses on?"

Her friend answered matter-of-factly, "Well, I need one pair to read the speedometer, one to see the road, and one just in case the other two don't work."

The good news is that the size of the older population is projected to double during the next 30 years. I'll never feel alone again because there will be 70 million baby boomers using special glasses, talking clocks and computers, and enough electricity to light up both Mars and Jupiter.

The bad news is that they'll all still be driving.