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JOYFUL MUSINGS

By Joy Birnbach Dunstan, MA, LPC, MAC

The Donkey and the Farmer

As you are reading my column this month, I am away on a long-awaited adventure on the other side of the world. For more than three years now I have been putting aside money for my trip of a lifetime: I'll be visiting Thailand, Vietnam, and a bit of Cambodia. I don't have any idea what sort of exotic surprises await me, but I'm looking forward to an amazing journey.

While I'm away on my travels, I've left for you a charming tale of simple wisdom to help you begin this new year. Enjoy!

One day a farmer's donkey fell into an abandoned well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally, he decided the animal was too old to be useful to him anymore and the well needed to be covered up anyway, so it just wasn't worth it to him to try to retrieve the donkey.

He invited all of his neighbors to come over and help him. They each grabbed a shovel and began to toss dirt into the well. Realizing what was happening, the donkey at first cried and wailed horribly. Then, a few shovelfuls later, he quieted down completely.

The farmer, wondering why the donkey was suddenly quiet, peered down into the well. He was astounded by what he saw. With every shovelful of dirt that hit his back, the donkey would shake it off and take a step up on the new layer of dirt. As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he would shake it off and take another step up. Pretty soon, the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off, to the shock and astonishment of everyone.

The moral of this story: Life is going to shovel dirt on you, all kinds of dirt. The trick to getting out of the well is to stop wailing and not let the dirt bury you, but to shake it off and take a step up. Each of our troubles is a potential steppingstone, an opportunity to step up. We can get out of the deepest wells simply by not stopping, never giving up!

Shake off your troubles, and take a step up. And remember these five basic rules to be happy:

1. Free your heart from hatred.
2. Free your mind from worries.
3. Live simply.

4. Give more.
5. Expect less.

And by the way, after that donkey calmed down, he kicked the \$*!@ out of the farmer who tried to bury him alive, which brings us to the second moral of this story: When you try to cover your ass, it will usually come back to get you in the end.

Have a wonderful new year, and take a step up whenever you can! See you in February. And don't forget to pick up your copy of my book, *Joyful Musings: Growing Up, Self-Discovery, and Reflections on Life North & South of the Border*. Available at Diane Pearl's, Mia's, and Amazon.com.

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