

Maybe So; Maybe Not

By: Rick Poling

There once was a village that had among its people a very wise old man. The villagers trusted this man to provide them with answers to their questions and concerns.

One day, a farmer from the village rushed to the wise man and said frantically, "Wise man, please help me. A horrible thing has happened. My ox has died and now I have no animal to help me plow my field! Isn't this the worst thing that could possibly happen to me?" The wise old man quietly replied, "Maybe so, maybe not." The farmer could hardly believe his ears, and exclaimed, "What? Surely you are not disagreeing that this is a horrible thing that has happened to me!" Again, the wise man kindly looked him in the eye and calmly repeated, "Maybe so, maybe not." Disgusted, the farmer hurried back to the village and reported to his neighbors that the wise man had either gone mad or grown callous and incoherent. Surely this was the worst thing that could have happened to him; why couldn't the wise man see this?

The very next day, still despondent and uncertain of how he could manage his farm without an ox, the farmer took a long walk over his land, and spotted a strong, young horse grazing in one of his distant fields. Because the farmer had no ox to rely upon, he immediately had the idea to catch the horse to replace the ox – and he did. How joyful the farmer was . . . plowing the field had never been easier, and now, he no longer had to walk everywhere he went; he had a horse to ride! The wise man's words came back to mind, and thinking now that maybe the wise man was actually still very wise after all, he went back to see the old sage and to apologize. "You were right, wise man. Losing my ox wasn't the worst thing that could have happened. It was a blessing in disguise! I never would have taken my long walk and captured my new horse had that not happened, and you have to agree that getting this new horse is certainly the best thing that could happen to me." The wise man replied once again, "Maybe so, maybe not." Not again, thought the farmer; this time, the wise man's answer could not possibly be right. Thinking that the old sage had become unreliable, the farmer vowed to never seek his advice again.

A few days later, the farmer's son was riding the horse and was thrown off. He broke his leg, and it was apparent that he would not be able to help with the crops when harvest time arrived. "Oh no," thought the farmer; "now we will lose a great deal of money and maybe even starve to death!" Once again, the farmer remembered the wise man's reply and realized it had proved correct, so he went again to see the wise man. The farmer exclaimed: "How did you know that capturing my horse was not a good thing? You were right! My son was injured by the horse and won't be able to help with the crop. This time, I'm sure that this is the worst thing that could have possibly happened to me." But, just as he had done before, the wise man calmly looked at the farmer and in a compassionate tone replied once again, "Maybe so, maybe not." Enraged that the wise man could be so ignorant and insensitive, the farmer stormed away.

The next day, troops arrived to take every able-bodied young man to a war that had just erupted. Facing a considerably larger army under unprepared conditions, the odds of surviving the war were projected to be very small. With his broken leg, the farmer's son was the only young man in the village who didn't have to go. He would live, while the others would most likely die.

Immediately, the farmer realized once again the wisdom of the wise man's words, which he had doubted each and every time.

I first read that story long ago but often think of it as the source of many valuable lessons I've derived and confirmed from other sources as well, and use as guides in life and in work: Maintain a long-term rather than a short-term view. Don't make mountains out of molehills. Don't waste time, energy and emotion worrying about things that can't be controlled or that have a small probability of occurring. If we are not careful, we humans tend to assume the worst rather than the best of things and of other people. When something bad happens, keep a cool head and an open-mind to changes or opportunities that may not have otherwise developed and that may prove positive. Give people second (or even more) chances if they are sincere. Be slow to anger and quick to apologize or forgive. Dwelling upon the past or upon a negative aspect of the present can prevent seizing or receiving something much more positive in the future. Life often hands us difficulties and troubles, but many times these turn out to be blessings in disguise. I can't always control nor choose many of life's events, but I can always control and choose my attitude and my response to those events. For every "maybe not," there is at least one "maybe so." And, if we are open to it, God and life's circumstances have a way of putting us right where we should be.

I feel like I'm exactly where I should be right now, and I hope you feel that you are too. As one who grew up in Calhoun County, attended WVU undergrad and law school, and represented my University and State in many capacities and places as the WVU "Mountaineer," I have always considered West Virginia "home," even though I've lived out-of-state the past twenty-five years. During my frequent trips here to visit family and friends, I would often ask, "why have so many of my generation left; why haven't more stayed to be a part of this community?" Finally, one day, I had the "man in the mirror" experience . . . the kind when one asks the same questions of themselves that they generally ask only of others: "hey, why haven't **YOU** stayed?" And, with my own son now out of high school and moved away from the only place HE has called "home" (Charlotte), I had no meaningful responses. So, here I am ... "home."

And, I feel I've arrived here at a very vital time that is full of opportunities and promise for the Calhoun County Committee on Aging. Blessed with an insightful and productive Board of Directors and staff through the past several years, CCCOA is a strong and vibrant organization that has clearly defined and accomplished its goals of service to the Seniors of Calhoun County. Those goals will need to be pushed and expanded even further in coming years as we stand at the juncture of a historic time: the intersection of a time when our citizens are living much longer and more active lives than just a few short years ago (a trend that will continue pushing upward!) coupled with the time when the largest generation in this Country's history (the Baby-Boomers) is reaching "Senior" status. We live in a time when the "Senior" segment of the U.S. population will not only become by far the largest segment of our population (compared to "Youth and Adolescents," "Young Adults," and "Middle-Aged Adults"), but will continue to widen what is already the Senior segment's bragging-right over the other segments: the greatest span in age. At CCCOA, we will likely see a fifty year span in our Seniors' ages in the not-so-distant future . . . so, **NOW** is the time to plan and to be prepared!

Our employee **TEAM** at CCCOA has one overriding mission that we will be pursuing and accomplishing together: **“To provide the best possible services to our Seniors with excellence and to enjoy doing it in the process, so that we’re all able to look back on our efforts and results every day with pride and satisfaction.”** We hope everyone will share in the fulfillment, enjoyment, pride and satisfaction of our organization ... this is one “Maybe So, Maybe Not” in which the choice is totally yours!

QUOTE OF THE MONTH: “I am still determined to be cheerful and happy in whatever situation I may be; for I have also learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions and not upon our circumstances.” Martha Washington