



Can Bee Venom

and Other Tales of Natural Remedies

BY MARK MATHEW BRAUNSTEIN

Being happy and healthy and paraplegic are not an improbable combination. I suspect that I see its reflection in the mirror every morning. While happiness is intangible, health is quantifiable, definable. So here I'll discuss only health and paraplegia.



In 1990, I dived into a river and emerged paralyzed below the waist. So what. One's journey out of disability is more edifying than any injury that led into it. Indeed I've experienced significant recovery, including getting off my ass and walking with crutches, as well as getting my shit together and regaining bowel function.

Pardon my bedpan humor, but I still "pray for piss." I do feel the urge, but can't do anything about it, so to relieve myself I stick a tube up my plumbing, which increases my susceptibility to urinary tract infections (I'm telling you?), yet during my 17 years as a paraplegic I have never had a UTI. For this feat, perhaps someday I'll be listed as a medical marvel in the book of *Guinness World Records*.

Feat or not, fear not, as I safeguard against UTIs in several ways. Ambulating helps prevent urine from stagnating in a puddle in the bladder. I also drink copious amounts of filtered well water and unadulterated juices — to the tune of at least seven full bladders a day. And since age 18, 20 years pre-paraplegia, I have maintained a whole foods vegan diet that keeps my urine acidic. Acidity in urine inhibits the growth of bacteria, while an alkaline environment fosters their growth.

Neither before nor after paraplegia did I consume the things notable for turning urine alkaline — white flour, white sugar, animal protein, fried foods, junk foods, soft drinks, caffeine, alcohol and pharmaceutical drugs. Please do not think for one minute that my diet is ascetic. I savor my salads, greens, grains, beans, seeds, sprouts, nuts, avocados, mangoes, melons, cherries, berries (notably not cranberries, too tart to eat unsweetened), plums, peaches and apples.

However, a year ago, a snake slithered into my Eden. I began bedwetting. Never while awake, only when asleep at night. And not just once, but often twice, and sometimes three times a night. While I do feel fullness of bladder, that sensation is not quite fully normal, and I do sleep very soundly, two factors which could contribute to the bedwetting. But why did it begin 16 years post-injury? Belladonna, prescribed by a naturo-

Cure Incontinence?

pathic physician, had for 15 years effectively treated my neurogenic bladder during my waking hours. But while sleeping, suddenly I was having problems.

Ouch!

I was losing sleep over this mystery. By the time urgent discomfort eventually woke me in the middle of the night, I already needed to change my soaked undies, and despite precautionary measures, sometimes also my soaked bedding ("rest in piss"). Kissing goodbye to sultry nights of sexual passion, I was beginning to feel like an old man. Maybe this is normal for age 55, as incontinence does increase with aging, but I hardly look or feel my age in all other regards.

You might expect this to make me one unhappy camper, except that the camp that I call my home is among my sources of joy. I live alone in a nature preserve, not quite wilderness, but nature nonetheless. My neighbors are rabbits and deer, whose most acute sense is smell. As I do not eat animal protein, my odor is not that of a predator. Rabbits and deer do not flee me.

Another aid to my acceptance in nature is my wheelchair, by which deer recognize me from a mile away. Seated, I'm their height, so hardly intimidating. The peaceful evenings I have shared seated among deer are more spiritually enriching than any other experience of my life. And I could not enter into this communion afoot.

My communion with nature extends also to interaction in my kitchen with ants, whom I try not to kill but just brush aside, and in my garage with wasps, whose nests hang just a foot above my head when I'm crutching. Every winter the empty nests usually dislodge and disappear. And every spring the wasps return and rebuild new nests. Year after year for 20 years I have upheld a covenant with the wasps. I don't hurt them, and they don't hurt me. Until the day a wasp did hurt me.

Seated in my wheelchair, I was sweeping the ground, oblivious to the tip of the long broomstick swinging in close proximity to a low-hanging nest. Clutching the broomstick, I was stung on the finger by a wasp. Ouch! It really hurt! But I held no enmity toward the

wasp — its judging me a threat was justified.

The site of the sting immediately began to swell. I thought, what a potent force is this single drop of venom from such a tiny and amazing creature. And I wondered, how the #@%! can I reduce the swelling and the pain?

Then I did what you'd expect of any stargazing, tree-hugging, binocular and bird guide-toting lover of the great outdoors. I fled indoors.

As an aspiring Mr. Natural, I consulted my trusty nutritional and natural healing books. My first for aid is the 777-page tome, *Prescription for Nutritional Healing*, by Phyllis and James Balch. Let me see. Wasp Sting — see Bee Sting, which alphabetically is listed right after Bed-Wetting.

The two entries face opposite each other — Bed-Wetting the sole heading on the left-hand page, Bee Sting the sole heading on the right. During the entire drenching year of my nocturnal leakage, I deemed the problem mechanical, so never thought to research a nutritional remedy, no more than I might have considered seeking cures there for spinal cord injury. The book does provide detailed nutritional advice for multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease. Yet here Bed-Wetting was staring me in the face, and almost could have bit me on the nose.

Continence Regained

So, what is my good book's recommendation for preventing bedwetting? Along with aids for improving bladder function and strengthening bladder muscle, the sole "aid in controlling bladder spasms" is calcium and magnesium supplementation. Also: "We know of several cases of bedwetting (among children and adults) that were relieved within a matter of days when supplements of certain nutrients were supplied. Among these were magnesium ..."

Bingo! My light bulb flashed on! A year earlier, immediately after a routine annual bone density test and shortly before my plight with plumbing, I had decided to stop taking a daily pill of 500 mg of calcium and 250 mg of magnesium. Did I say magnesium?

As a purported preventative against osteoporosis, I had been taking a minimal dosage

for the previous 10 years. But tired of popping pills, and all along unconvinced of their efficacy in the prevention of osteoporosis, I dropped them from my daily regimen. The average American diet provides ample calcium, and with a healthy dose of vanity, I considered my diet much better than average.

A ratio of one-part magnesium to two-parts calcium to four parts phosphorus is an ideal balance provided by most whole foods. The problem for many Americans lurks in their unwholesome diets of excessive phosphorus that throws that ratio out of balance, and in their decadent lifestyles that impede assimilation of calcium, ample dosage or not. Sum and substance, calcium supplements do not prevent osteoporosis if no further adjustments are made in one's diet and lifestyle.

My own condition verges on osteopenia, a stage before osteoporosis, and my concern is not inadequate intake of calcium, but inadequate exercise. Namely, walking. While I walk with crutches, I do not walk enough, as I walk only outdoors. Indoors at home and at my full-time job, I use a wheelchair in order to free my hands.

I do not routinely pop vitamin or mineral pills just for vague assurance for the same reasons that I do not take pharmaceutical drugs, but those reasons are entirely another story. (See my chapter, "Take the Pain," in *From There to Here: Stories of Adjustment to Spinal Cord Injury*, edited by Gary Karp and Stanley Klein, published in 2004 by No Limits Communications.) Vitamin pills, mineral pills and herbals are my first resort for remedy of acute ailments, or even for chronic conditions such as bedwetting.

The day after reading about magnesium as a treatment for bladder spasms, I reinstated daily supplementation of 500 mg calcium and 250 mg magnesium. And I am happy to report that my bedwetting was "relieved within a matter of days."

So now I understand the destiny that led me to be stung by that wasp, to whom I owe my newly regained continence. M

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