

A graceful doe crossed my path the other day. She turned once to look at me before she scampered off into the forest, a quick second in time, but a vision that stayed with me for the rest of the day.

Why had this unremarkable incident made such an impression on me? Some of you may be muttering, "So what? I've seen lots of deer and it isn't anything special."

Let me begin by recalling the way I slammed the door leaving the house that morning. Cursing under my breath as I started up the car, and sighing when I thought about all the work remaining on my desk that had to be done within the next couple of hours, life was so unfair. Here I was — in a hot car, with no makeup, dressed in sweaty clothes that stuck to me — with business errands to run at the most inopportune time.

My personal life wasn't much better. There was grocery shopping to be done, dogs to be carted to the vet, clothes to pack for a business trip (still at the dry cleaners — another stop!) and my nails were about three inches long and in dire need of a fill.

And then, as I made my way down the mountain, I spotted the doe. I slammed on the brakes, took a swallow of water from my water bottle, and sat for a few minutes after she had sprinted away. Remembering Richard Carlson's marvelous best-selling book, "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff...and it's all Small Stuff," I suddenly was in no hurry to get to where I was going.

Carlson's book is fast becoming dog-eared on my nightstand. It's an inspirational series of chapters that zeroes in on the different levels of stress we all tend to experience and then provides the reader with food for thought on ways to alleviate that stress.

For instance, in my case, his chapter 22, Repeat to Yourself, 'Life Isn't an Emergency,' summarizes how I felt that particular morning when the passing



## As I See It

Peg DeMarco

doe made me stop and reevaluate my priorities. Carlson's right when he says, "The first step in becoming a more peaceful person is to have the humility to admit that, in most cases,

you're creating your own emergencies. Life will usually go on if things don't go according to plan."

Carlson also devotes a whole other chapter to, "Remind yourself that when you die, your 'in basket' won't be empty." I worked for a boss back in the 1980s who gave me that same advice. The job was in a very busy payroll/personnel office, and she met with me personally on my first day. Pointing to stacks of paperwork on my desk, she smiled when she saw the concerned look on my face. "Yes, that's your desk," she said, laying her hand on my sinking shoulder. "Your inbox is never going to be empty no matter how hard you work. You could put in an 80-hour week and it would still be full. Just do your best and that will be good enough for this job and me." I worked for that amazing lady for more than 10 years.

The crux of the matter is that somehow, self-imposed deadlines will be met, but not if one doesn't set realistic expectations along the way so he or she doesn't set himself or herself up to fail. None of us wants to fail, but a lot of us head in that direction because as perfectionists, we know no other way.

Perhaps one way is to view life and appreciate its magnificence for what it truly is: a kaleidoscope of natural beauty in the least obvious places and during the most unexpected times. If we can make time to discover life's beauty and interweave it into our everyday lives, perhaps failure will never rear its ugly head in all that we attempt.

For example, for years I've been traveling to faraway places, hopping on jets and snapping pictures of places that I probably won't ever see again, but I've never stopped long enough to appreciate what was in my own backyard. It's been only recently that I take time out from a busy day to watch in fascination as a hungry groundhog pops out of its hole around dusk to munch on bread and seeds thrown out for the birds. It's a quiet time in an otherwise jam-packed day — a time sorely needed for each and every one of us.

Escaping from the norm and delving into areas that aren't so popular can also bring self-satisfaction as one explores life's surprises. For example, growing perfect roses has always been a hobby of mine. I feed them, spray them for nasty insects, prune them faithfully and sit back and marvel at the perfect bud that forms because I know it will produce a glorious rose.

But what does repetition produce? Boredom. So, a couple of months ago, I planted

a couple of cactuses just to see if I could successfully grow them. To my surprise, those basically unattractive succulents produced stunning, colorful flowers with little nurturing on my part. Now, when I measure the flower power of the old standard, red velvety rose to the newly found exotic fuzzy flower of the prickly cactus, my self-satisfaction is surprisingly on an equal par.

Carlson's tagline is so appropriate in today's world: "Simple ways to keep the little things from taking over your life," because the little things he's referring to are actually what we consider to be monumental tasks. They're not. Trust me.

So, the next time a deer crosses your path and you stop to pay tribute to the act, or the next time you take the road less traveled rather than your usual route, take a moment to pat yourself on the back. You may not know it, but you've accomplished an amazing goal.

PEG DEMARCO is a local columnist for The News Herald.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2004

# Learning how to not sweat the small stuff

## LIFESTYLES

THE NEWS HERALD **C5**