

Each virus mutation heralded as the 'Big One'

Like the boy who cried wolf, the epidemiologists may have spoken one time too many.

Since they learned how to decode virus DNA, the disease experts have been predicting the next "Big One" every other year for a couple of decades.

Each mutation of the influenza genetic code has been heralded as the progenitor of the next 1918-style outbreak.

A couple of years ago, it was the Asian bird flu that would sweep the world with deadly effect. The forces of the medical world mobilized, but nothing happened. The new strain just seemed to fade away.

Before that, half a dozen others. At the same time, new strains of equine encephalitis (including the West Nile virus) were said to be poised to produce the next great mosquito-borne plague. That never happened, either.

And unless you happened to know one of the unfortunates who fell victim to West Nile (and some of us did), the virus passed without so much as a ripple.

It's not that epidemiologists are not good people trying to perform a public service. They fear the worst, and in their business, the worst could be very bad indeed. The 1918 "Spanish" influenza outbreak sickened as many as 50 million people worldwide and killed millions. It seemed to have been the result of a "perfect storm" involving a newly mutated virus, a world population with few immunities and a time when global travel was on the rise.

Today, of course, with round-the-world airline service, a commonplace, disease can move as quickly as we can. The latest "swine flu" has hopped continents more quickly than its predecessors ever could have. It truly had wings.

There are several other truths about this situation:

- The advice the disease control people give us is elementary: wash your hands, stay out of crowds, stay home if you are sick. It's the same thing we hear every year when cold and flu season approaches. Good counsel, but minimally effective against an epidemic.

- Drugs and other treatments offer little comfort beyond "take two aspirin and call me in the morning." There's not much medical science can do to lessen the impact of a virus once contracted, even today.

- This kind of panic involves a self-fulfilling prophecy. The epidemiologists will keep predicting the next "Big One" until it actually comes. Then they will tell us, "See. We were right all along."

The Cassandras who predict earthquakes to ruin California operate on the same principle, and history and science tell us they, too, will be "right" one day.

- The danger and cost of overreacting could be as great — or greater — than the actual danger of the flu. Closed businesses and schools have cost the world economy billions already. Nations such as Mexico that can ill afford the setbacks.

The jury is still out on this mutation. When it did not spread as fast or as far as predicted, "experts" noted that the 1918 outbreak "summered over" before it blossomed into a true killer the next winter.

That might happen again. It might not. Whatever comes this time, the Chicken Littles of Atlanta and New York will be on the parapet, crying out the danger. Some day, their most dire predictions may even come true. Meantime, go wash your hands again.

— Steve Haynes



No fun limping with sore toe

I've been limping around for a couple of weeks.

I came up with a corn on my little toe about three weeks ago. At first I thought I had just cut the nail too close, and it would be OK in a couple of days. But after a couple of days, the toe was still sore and there was a hard place right beside the nail.

Dang, a corn. I hadn't had a corn in 20 years. And I'm not happy about this one — but then who ever is happy about sore feet?

I went to visit Dr. Scholl and bought some medicine. It's just a small bandage with a spot of salicylic acid on it. The salicylic acid eats away the corn — and just about anything else it touches.

I remember using something similar the last time I had this problem. The acid ate away at the corn and it fell out, leaving me with a hole in my foot. I was less than ecstatic about that, but the hole healed and the corn didn't return.

This time, I put the little bandage as closely over the corn as possible



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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and took off. Each one lasts two days, then you have to change it.

Yuck. Where the acid is, it leaves dead white skin. My toe looks like it's been in water for about five years. And of course, the skin around the corn is affected as well. All in all, the cure is almost as bad as the disease, but hopefully won't hurt as bad.

As I limp around with my sore toe, however, it brings back memories of a story my mother told me.

She was in college in Arkansas and her girl friends talked her into going to a dance with them, even though she had just had surgery on one of her toes.

It was during World War II, and

the dance was full of young soldiers.

One young man in particular would not take no for an answer and repeatedly asked her to dance.

She says she remembers thinking to herself, "Soldier boy, if you step on my toe, it will be the last thing you ever do."

Apparently, he didn't, because they were still dancing 40 some years later.

Daddy's gone now, and Mom's in a wheelchair, but my sore toe doesn't seem nearly as achy when I remember how they met.

However, I still hope Dr. Scholl does his magic, because I've got some dancing of my own to do.

Working weekend is a bust

I had a three-day weekend — and, it wasn't even a holiday. Jim took Friday off. That was the first mistake. We had all these projects we were going to tackle. And, you know what happened. We didn't get any of them done.

Things began going haywire early in the day when I remembered I had fed the calves the last serving of their milk formula the night before. That meant Jim had to make a flying trip to pick up milk replacer. And, that always takes longer than you think.

So, right off the bat, our schedule was more than an hour behind.

The main thing on our to-do list was get Jim's paycheck deposited. It was close to the noon hour as we were driving to the neighboring town where we do our banking. I was feeling pressured because (in my mind) it was Saturday and the drive-up window would close at noon. A check of my watch indicated we would not have one minute to spare. So, I dialed the bank on my cell phone. Yes, I know my bank's number. It's from all those times calling to check balances.

Anyway, someone answered and after identifying myself, I asked if they could stay open a minute or two longer because we wouldn't get there until right at noon. In a very patient voice the teller said, "Why,



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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Mrs. Plotts, we'll be here until 5:30. You have plenty of time."

"I thought you closed at noon on Saturday?" I halfheartedly asked. "We do," she said. "But, this is Friday."

Egads! Why did I tell her my name? Now, instead of merely suspecting I might be loony — she knows.

-ob-

Monday was Jim's dad's 92nd birthday. It's been a tough year on Dad after losing a leg in a freaky farm accident. But, he is amazingly resilient and has maintained a positive attitude throughout it all. His strong faith compels him to believe there is a purpose to be found in his circumstances.

Dad lives at a long-term care facility. Last week he had someone bring him an old wig he kept out at his house. He modeled it for the staff and residents garnering the laughs he was aiming for. Next, even the nurses were trying it on. It provided a lot of amusement for everyone.

Now, I know where my husband gets his "corny" sense of humor.

We helped Dad celebrate by bringing his favorite kind of birthday party to him — homemade ice cream and cake. I baked an angel food cake and a chocolate Texas sheet cake vanilla ice cream. I got those number candles so he only had two candles to blow out.

It was quite a day. Happy Birthday, Dad! And, many more.

From the Bible

And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Matthew 8:2, 3

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Junior high coaches do good job

To the editor:

I wanted to comment on the high quality coaching of our junior high track team. I have attended all of the track meets for Decatur Community Junior High, and have to say that we are fortunate to have the staff and facilities here at Oberlin that allow our young people to excel at their individual events. The organization of the events when we were the hosts of the track meet was also much better than most of the towns that we

are involved with.

At the track meet in Goodland, I was talking to some parents of an athlete from another town, and they commented on how they wished their coaches would be involved and help at the meet as much as Oberlin's. Our coaches are at the events helping fine tune our athletes' skills to perform at their highest level.

I would also like to especially express my appreciation to Mr. Johnson for his willingness to spend

time and effort working with my granddaughter to perform her best even though he knew that she would be moving and attending another school next year.

It would be easy to just concentrate his time on our returning students for next year.

And last but not least, congratulations, Jordan, on winning one of the Black Shirt Awards for an athlete's positive attitude and good effort.

Larry Ganje, Oberlin

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