

Discombobulation

Written by Gayle Nobel

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Yesterday was the first day I felt ready to hike after being sick for a few days. In fact, I was more than ready, I was itching. Yup, I get itchy in that way... crazy, huh? The morning was taken up waiting for and then waiting around while my new induction stovetop was being installed. It followed the rule of any home project in that it always takes longer and is more complicated than you think it will be. Fortunately, an installer, not my husband, was doing the work and he had the pleasure of cutting my countertop to make it fit.

I was writing and being busy and watching the thermometer on my clock steadily rise. By the time he left, it was well into the 90's.. okay, almost 100. Too hot to hike. More busy stuff and as it got later and later, I got itchier and itchier, so I decided to go anyway. It was around 104 degrees at the top but I didn't care- it felt good to sweat. As I was about to take a few moments to look around and smell the roses, or rather, the dry desert with no foliage, I was stung by a bee!

Surprise! In all my years on this planet, I have not been stung. My husband is highly allergic to bee stings. Before we were married, I watched him pass out after being stung by a wasp. Full blown anaphylaxis. A few years ago, Kyle was stung in the pool and a lump developed that did not go away for a long time. The doctor suspected an allergy so we carry an epipen and benydral when we are out. But me? I had no idea if I was allergic.

I headed home as quickly as I could. Somehow during the journey down the mountain, I managed to create a full blown panic about whether or not I was allergic to bee stings. There was nobody out on the mountain if I got into trouble. I went through all kinds of scary scenarios in my mind and my fitness heart rate monitor was measuring anxiety. Yup, my heart rate was elevated to climbing up BPM when I was walking down. Was the icky feeling part of just being overheated or was I getting ready to have a reaction?

No reaction, I was ok. Just before I got back to the house, I looked at my phone and there was a big yellow triangle with an exclamation point that said extreme heat warning. I slid it to the ready to go position and was immediately on the dial pad screen which read "call for help". Isn't that ironic? My phone got panicky too. Fortunately, I was outside my front door and did not need help. Apparently, wearing my phone on my arm caused it to get very very hot and my electronic mommy assumed I was probably overheated and in trouble. The iPhone is a pretty smart gal.

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I rushed in the door, frazzled and overheated and wondering if I still might have a reaction. After some long drinks and sitting down and assessing the bee sting, I realized I was indeed, going to live. Time to figure out dinner. Uh oh, I had no idea how to operate the new cooktop. I actually had to get out the instruction manual to turn on my stove.

By the time I was in a position to fix dinner, I was flustered, unorganized and a bit overwhelmed. I had trouble slipping into my usual dinner prep routine.

And the point is?

Later on, I got to thinking about Kyle and wondering if this is what a lot of his world feels like to him. Do most things seem to happen randomly? Even though I tell him where we are going and what we are going to do, do my words get fully processed? If it's something new or unfamiliar and he has limited or no past experiences to form a visual picture, then what? Do the "What's Next?" photographs we use get interpreted correctly or is much of life a confusing surprise? I have no idea.

For people with autism, routines are especially important. For all of us, routines are important but we do not cling to them because we are usually able to deal with uncertainty and switch gears when necessary. I certainly switched gears in my kitchen, post overheat, post bee sting, post how does this stove work. I was a bit discombobulated but it did not throw me over the edge.

Is discombobulated Kyle's norm? Is it often extreme to the point of throwing him over his edge? Does the world seem to happen suddenly and randomly, just like my bee sting? Some of his behavior makes a lot more sense when viewed through this lens.

Hmmm. I wonder.