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COMMENTARY

# Spence: Happy thoughts are good medicine

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On Saint Patrick's Day, I came down with one of the bugs that had been making its way through Austin. Since no one really had a name for it, I called it the sickness, and for more than two weeks it laid me low. I am not complaining. I am, however, passing on all that I learned during the time I was sick.

First, I learned that everyone has a remedy for the sickness. Some swear by homeopathic remedies and family concoctions. Some say to feed the sickness; other say go on a liquid diet. A friend from Dallas told me to get an antibiotic ASAP. "Loosen that stuff up," several said. "Dry it up," said others.

Many decreed that salt is the best remedy of all. Not everyone agreed, however, on what to do with the salt. Some folks say to put it up your nose; others say to gargle with it. I think somebody told me to put some in my ears. Since they were really stopped up, however, I could have misunderstood that advice. I gave in and had a little salt  $\hat{o}$  with the tequila I sipped, for medicinal purposes, of course.

Though each person swore by their treatment, they also said it would take a long time to get over the sickness. They were right. But I continued to sip a little tequila as the sickness wore on.

I learned that you should definitely make it to your hair appointment during your sickness, and that there are lots of people in various stages of the sickness who are also there. Though you don't want to spread the bug, if you look fabulous, you're bound to feel better faster. I also learned that two cups of strong coffee and a few Tylenol help you get through social events. Sipping a tiny amount of tequila will soothe your raw throat while you're there looking fabulous.

While I was sick, I discovered that there are TV shows on 24 hours a day! I managed to prop up my head enough to watch a few of them. On TLC, I saw two episodes of "What Not to Wear." Since the clothes the hosts tossed resembled things in my closet, I felt worse after watching it. When I tuned in to watch "Ellen," however, I felt better. She wears the exact clothes that were banished on the fashion show.

When I could finally sit up, I started reading the pile of books next to my bed. First up was Sinclair Lewis' "Babbitt." It had been almost 40 years since I read the 1922 novel, and I still found it fascinating. George F. Babbitt was a man who was driven, beyond anything else, to look and act the part of a solid citizen. He joined the right club, drove the right car and lived in the right neighborhood. He woke up each morning, proud that his alarm clock was state-of-the art and certain that his electric cigarette lighter gave him a touch of class. That book hardly cheered me up during those gloomy days.

I learned from a television ad that if you buy a place 20 miles from Austin, your life will be perfect because you'll have everything your heart desires—the look you've always wanted and the life you so richly deserve. If George Babbitt were alive today, he'd live in that residential community with a seductive name and homogenous lawns. I wondered if I would have felt better during my sickness if I lived in that upscale neighborhood west of Austin rather than in my eclectic South Austin one.


The most important thing I learned, during my little bout of the sickness, was something I had almost forgotten: that a few puny days can raise the celebration bar for the perky days that follow. So tonight at sunset, I think I'll have a few sips of tequila (with salt, of course) and toast sundown, springtime in Austin and all good things.

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