

Letter to the Editor

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Editorial staff
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Dear editor,

I have been told the best way to relate a surprising event is to sneak up on it. That way the reader can be just as surprised as you were yourself. In this letter I will relate the most surprising thing that I think can happen to a man, so I will start with the largest red herring my straightforward style will allow.

Marsha Guggenheim was a famous woman in her day. I became acquainted with her through her skull. Skulls are funny things, really—they have quite the morbid reputation, but are the most interesting piece of anatomy for posthumous reinvigoration. It is true I have gotten more use out of a particular bovine femur than I ever have out of a skull, but more on that later.

As I say, Marsha Guggenheim was famous. Fame is one of those things that has considerable power on the mind, and the bullet that lived in her skull became quite famous in its tribe as well. So famous, in fact, that the bullet tribe it belonged to actually called me in as a medic when the bullet became ill.

The illness proved quite minor, just a few malignant tumors in the marrow, easily cured by the incantations Smith and Waterfellow designed specifically for such cases, as described in Proc. of the Med. & Mag. Soc., vol. 173 pp. 34-37. It was after I had administered these incantations that I made my mistake.

I have a particular fondness for skulls, for which reason bullet tribes hold a strange fascination for me. I had never actually been among such a tribe on invitation before and so my action might be excusable, though I knew I was ill-advised to act before I did so. But my curiosity got the better of me, and with a stroke I energized the skull and awoke Mrs. Guggenheim. She and I had enjoyed a few minutes tête-à-tête when Marsha's current inhabitant awoke.

As you know, bullets don't really have heads of their own, just a stub of a neck on which they fasten whatever skull they can find. They wrap their identity up in these

skulls to a ridiculous degree, and even if they didn't I suppose most people would be insulted to find you talking with their hat instead of it's occupant. In any case, when the bullet awoke it became intensely mad and summarily tossed me against the wall of the hut, springing after me on its massive trunk of a leg and letting out a terrifying bellowing noise.

Well, if there is one lesson I have learned in my time as a traveling medic it is to never leave home without a stout traveling companion, and I had one with me at the time in the form of the left femur of what must at one time have been quite the rodeo bull. This I awoke as I swung it at the nasty splay-toed foot of my assailant. Fortunately the blow landed on target and the femur gave enough of a kick to deflect the bullet from crushing my chest in its initial leap, as it no doubt intended.

I regained my feet in time to see my foe rebound against the far wall and come at me for a second try. As it closed I combined my own strength with that of the femur in a blow to the chest which I rather fancy was the cause of Marsha Guggenheim's skull having yet another body die beneath it. I didn't wait around to find out though, as the rest of the tribe could be heard springing toward the hut, no doubt responding to the cry of their famous tribe-mate and leader.

With a third swing of the femur I kicked a hole in the wall of the hut and, jumping through it, ran downhill toward the river. I had made it no more than a dozen yards when the tribe spotted me and came bounding after me like so many malicious pogo-sticks. The chase was hopeless—my feeble legs could never hope to outdistance the great springing bounds of the bouncing skulls at my heels. Nor could my single femur possibly take on an entire tribe of bullets, no matter how powerful the kicks it gave. My only hope lay in reaching the river before they could overtake me. Even this would have been impossible if not for the femur, but by striking it against the ground as I ran I was able to achieve a quite respectable three-legged gait.

I dove into the river just a pace ahead of the entire tribe of bullets, safe from their attacks for the moment. A bullet will never venture into water, its massive trunk-like leg and long spindly arms being singularly unsuited

for swimming. However, I knew that as soon as I surfaced the tribe would pelt me with stones, and sooner or later they were guaranteed to give me a concussion and I would black out and drown. I must, therefore, at all costs *not* surface anywhere near the tribe.

But this was something I had no idea of how to do. I was only a mediocre swimmer, better on the surface than at diving, and my breath was somewhat short from my recent sprint. I couldn't have been under for more than fifteen seconds before my lungs felt ready to burst and I started seeing stars. I had decided to surface, but a huge rock tossed only a few inches from my head made me change my mind. I was just trying to decide which was worse, concussion or drowning, when a solution presented itself to my mind.

The brain works in funny ways. You wouldn't think that, at a time when I was in such distress and facing such certain demise, I would be thinking of articles from the most recent issue of my favorite journal. You wouldn't think such would happen, and neither would I, but such is the nature of the mind. I reflected that I would not be able to correct the error in the article about snowflakes as a curative for harelip. I laughed anew at Moulten's comic piece about village witch-doctors. And then I remembered the incantation to become an animated stone statue.

It was an irreversible incantation that had been brought up earlier by a medic who was trying to find a countercharm, and this issue had contained a proof of its irreversibility supplied by none other than Sopua himself, of Ditster's Paradise fame. It was irreversible, but it suddenly struck me that it was less irreversible than death, and I remembered it quite clearly. With no further thought I let out my last breath and uttered the incantation.

The transformation happened much more rapidly than I expected; in fact, my growth to gianthood happened at a quite explosive rate, removing a large quantity of water from the river, knocking the bullets flat, and leaving a visible crater in the banks of the river on either side. As it turned out, this explosive quality was all that saved me, for otherwise the transformation turned out all wrong.

The article had implied that the patient who used the incantation had turned into an a twenty-something foot tall statue of solid marble such as one might see guarding one of the more majestic ruins, but fully animate and human in all other respects, breathing, eating (sand, but still eating), and sleeping in the normal way (Of particular note was the patient's waste product, which looked like ordinary excrement, albeit on a larger scale, but hardened into dark brown granite after a few hours. There were

several letters to the editor about this effect, one in particular advocating applying the incantation to convicts as a source of cement for public construction projects. A rather dangerous idea, if you ask me. The last people I would want becoming a race of stone giants would be our nation's convicted felons).

I appeared to have followed a different course. Incantations are not normally erratic in their effects, so I must have said it wrong somehow, but usually if you say an incantation wrong nothing happens at all. Still, the fact of the matter is I had definitely not become solid marble, being just as soft and fleshy as ever. I had grown a good deal, though, nearly doubling in height and more than quadrupling in girth.

I did not have time to reflect on this, however, as the bullets (remarkably robust creatures) were beginning to come round and, though being huge would tip the scales somewhat in my favor, I doubted if I could survive forty-to-one odds for long. I therefore waded to the far bank of the river and commenced jogging downstream as fast as my massive legs and oversized feet would carry me.

I was, at this time, barefoot, my shoes having been destroyed in my detonative growth, and running over the stone-strewn saw grass of the bullets' highland territory caused me considerable discomfort. I did not dare slacken my pace, however, for I felt certain that bruised and bleeding feet were better than a bruised and bleeding head, such as the hurled stones of the bullets would no doubt give me. Imagine my surprise, then, when a bullet sprang up beside me and asked me

"Have you seen a small human medic around here?"

I could scarcely believe my ears. Had the tribe failed to connect me with their quarry? I glanced over my shoulder and saw the rest of the tribe searching in the gorse and heather, paying me no mind. I stopped running (Oh! how my feet hurt) and said to the bullet

" "

Not a word came out. I moved my lips as though speaking; I made every effort I knew how to make to say something. The problem was I had no breath. I do not mean I was out of breath; I mean I was lacking the apparatus with which to breath. Realizing this, I shrugged my shoulders and shook my head. The bullet seemed to accept this answer and sprang back up stream without further comment.

As soon as the bullet had gone I sat down and inspected my feet. As I had feared, both soles were laced with deep cuts given by the sharp rocks on which I had run. I was initially scared to discover I was not bleeding and the inside of the cuts were a sort of pale salmon pink, such as one might see on a freshly cauterized wound. What on

earth could have seared the wounds? Then it dawned on me that if I had no lungs, I might not have a circulatory system either. This guess I soon verified, and returned my attention to my feet.

My first reaction was to mutter a little wound-stitching incantation and be on my way again, but mutter as I might no incantation came out of my mute lips. My next thought was to wrap my feet up in something, but my clothing had perished along with my shoes, and the surrounding gorse, heather, and saw-grass didn't offer much in the way of bandaging material either. Any other solution would require civilized assistance and civilization required walking, so I gingerly got back to my feet.

I only made it a few steps before sitting down again. This was ridiculous; surely a little pain wasn't going to stop me? Then I noticed the nice, smooth rocks on the bottom of the river. Wading in I found this way much more pleasant and splashed down stream for the next several hours. By the time I needed to leave the river my feet felt much better and the ground around me was not nearly so harsh, so I made pretty good time all day long. Reaching the lowlands around sunset I set off across the mossy wetlands toward my home town.

There is nothing like a nice stroll to stimulate thought. I had plenty of time for thought on this particular stroll, and plenty to think about as well. It's not every day that a medic finds himself robbed of the ability to ply his trade, and even less common for a human to find himself transformed into some kind of gigantic monstrosity, such as I was. It was obvious that my current form would be something of a hinderance to my current way of life.

However, there were distinct advantages to my new state of being. The first of these dawned on me as I was considering how I would earn my living. I had just realized what a vast quantity of food a giant would need when I noticed that I had been walking for some twelve hours without the least hint of hunger or thirst. Suddenly curious, I plucked a berry from a nearby currant bush and attempted to eat it. This proved quite impossible as my mouth was not connected to a throat. After trying vainly to swallow, I was forced to spit out the berry, a disgusting practice to one not accustomed to expectoration.

If, then, I had no need for food or drink, needed no air to breath, and apparently (for it was by now well past midnight and I was not even slightly tired) no need to sleep, It was not clear that I needed to earn a living at all. I would need clothing, of course, but I was certain I could earn that much though various odd jobs, as I was certain there would be much for which a giant would prove useful.

It was thus in a very optimistic frame of mind that

I arrived home a few hours before sunrise. I had little difficulty in vaulting the town wall and made my way without incident to my home. It was here I was faced with my second great difficulty, though fortunately not as bad as my inability to speak.

I think I mentioned that I had grown more in girth than in height. I had not realized the extent of this growth until I came face to face with human dwellings. I stood a little over nine feet tall, just a bit too short to look in the second story windows, but I found myself fully six feet across at the shoulder and some four feet deep in the chest. Even lying on my side, there was no way to get in through the front door. I suppose I wouldn't have been able to get in anyway, as my key had been in my trousers, which were now lost forever.

Fortunately, my bedroom window was large and located directly over my livingroom window, and both windows were the same size. With a little exertion I removed both of these window, frame, shutters, bars and all, as well as the section of wall that stood between them, making a nice large rectangular opening. The next hour or so I spent removing all my belongings from the second floor, ripping out the second story flooring and removing all my internal walls.

By sunup the place was feeling like a home again. There was room to move about and stretch, a comfortable chair made out of a couple of mattresses, and between my sheets and a tablecloth I had found enough material to make at least a loincloth, anything to cover my nakedness. I had covered up the word "medic" on my sign out front with the word "giant" and, as the sun rose and the town awoke sat down to write this account of what I anticipate will prove the most important event in my adult life.

I hope this letter will prove interesting to your readers. I myself will no longer be eligible for membership in the society, as I am not longer able to meet the basic entrance requirements. With many fond memories of my life as a medic,

I remain,
Yours sincerely,

name withheld