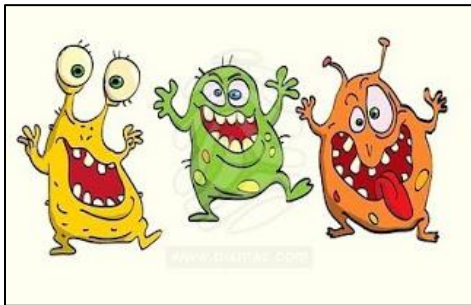


Saturday with My New Friends

This morning, the sun rose much earlier than I did. In fact, by strict chronological standards, I rolled out of bed at almost the halfway point as far as the twenty-four hours that make up a day are measured. The sun was shining directly overhead and that's not the way I begin a typical day, but this day, I wasn't alone.



Technically speaking, those flu bugs didn't just knock on my door. If that were the case, I would go into my "Jehovah's Witness" act and stand perfectly still out of site of my windows so it appears as if nobody is home. That usually does the trick. They might ring the bell a second time if they're really persistent (or how badly someone told them I needed to be saved), but my well-rehearsed performance always wins. I've never had to listen to their discourse on salvation. But the flu sneaks in. It never knocks, and you won't see two virus strains on bicycles peddling through your neighborhood wearing white shirts, helmets, and ties. It always manages to find a way in, and through some secretive method, signals others to join the party.



Uninvited guests aren't fun. Not everyone likes what I like, and even fewer people share my passion for sports, music, books, and Entenmann's original chocolate donuts. That's why I'm very particular about who crosses my threshold. The flu bug is no exception.

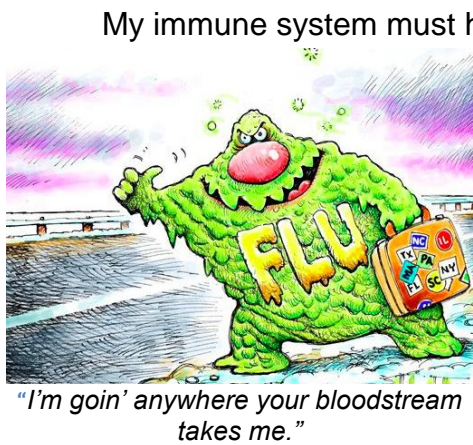
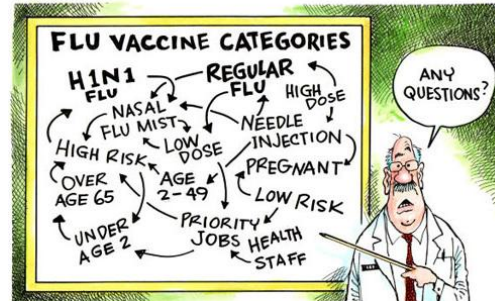
Two weeks ago, during a routine doctor's visit, my personal physician recommended a flu shot.

"Bob, you really should get it. There are some new strains out there that could knock you out for two weeks." Now, I always felt that my immune system did a good job, and I really didn't want millions of microorganisms taking joy rides through my bloodstream. Doc said, "I just had mine last week and I feel fine."

Less than a minute after I agreed, in came his nurse carrying the largest needle and syringe I'd ever seen! Perhaps it was my imagination, but she was holding that thing with two hands! My good doctor also said to me that yes, the flu shot does introduce a small strain of the virus into your system, but it's so small that your immune system would immediately go to "full-scale" alert and defeat it.



Once I received the injection, I would be immune to that strain. It sounded reasonable, so I rolled up my sleeve and prepared to act like being punctured with needles didn't bother me and that I wouldn't feel pain. It was at that point that my mind began to wander. Thoughts of Indian maharishis lying on beds of nails ran through my head, and I know that the nurse sensed fear and apprehension on my part. How do they do it? How could those nails not hurt or puncture their bodies? Maybe that's why they call them "holy men."



My immune system must have been AWOL or it was only shooting blanks at its attackers, because it was at that precise moment that things began to change. On my drive home, I swore I felt a warm movement starting from my left shoulder and slowly spreading through my body. It seemed to be moving at a molasses-like pace through my system. Psychosomatic illnesses are based on the perception that if you even remotely come into contact with germs, you'll contract that disease. But this time I knew differently. I actually saw the nurse inject a vial of Bubonic Plague and centuries of deadly diseases into

my body.

The flu doesn't hit you like a tidal wave or a tsunami; it does things slowly to annoy you (like I used to do to my sister when we were growing up). It starts by making your eyes irritated and itchy. You feel tired, and a succession of aching and stiffness begins in your shoulders. You notice nothing serious at first, because it doesn't blindsides you. Like the stars above, those symptoms only came out at night. I was able to function for a full day, but sometime around five PM, that internal alarm must have gone off and woke up all of those sleeping bugs.

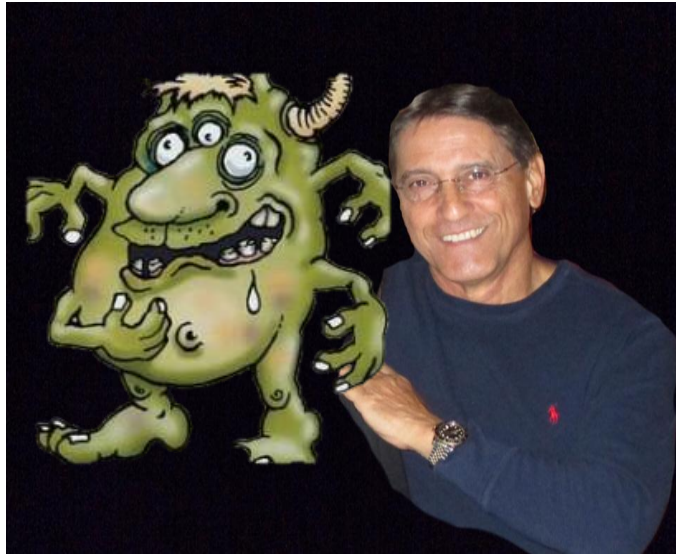


"Time to get moving! He's been going all day and should be a bit fatigued. This is the time to strike! Tonight we're going to the shoulders and the eyes again. After that, we'll start with the nose and sneezing. Got it?"

And so it was. Within a week, those little buggers were all over the place. I had aching muscles, a running nose and I began to sneeze and cough. Remind me to buy stock in Kimberly Clark; they make *Kleenex*, don't they? I knew I had to make that dreaded call to the Doc for some relief. After all, wasn't he the one who talked me into this experiment in acupuncture?

With that same bright sun still high overhead and a warm breeze blowing, I set out to the local Walgreens Drug store to pick up my new prescription of antibiotics. I guess an antibiotic is a secret weapon doctors prescribe that sneaks up on all those "biotics" (and aren't they what I needed to fight?) and beats the hell out of them! I couldn't wait to rip off the cap of that bottle and put those little green capsules to work.

Now I'm looking at the clock on the wall. If I stare at the big hand long enough, I can actually see it move, but it's not moving fast enough. I think I can feel the healing process beginning, but like that clock's movement, it isn't happening fast enough. So I'll be patient and take those antibiotics for the next nine days and hope for the best.



Meanwhile, I think I should start looking for some new friends!