

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Breath of Fresh Air

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Special to the Prophet

I walked by a house in the dark this morning and somebody was drying a load of clothes. The smell of Downy was all over the neighborhood. I stood under a streetlight and inhaled. If there's anything I like better than the smell of a brand new morning, it's the perfume of clean, warm Downy. It reminds me of my grandmother, who was tolerant in little, but who allowed me, one summer, to use as much Downy in my laundry as I wanted to.

I have friends who figure that if a little will do, then less will do even better. I wish I thought that way, but I never have. I'm more of the bent that if a little is good, then a great quantity is surely the attainment of some kind of virtuous nirvana. I don't do things by half or even by moderation. My idea of paradise is overkill. I drink a cup of tea like a good Russian who knows that tomorrow maybe there is no sugar, so today - eight cubes instead of one. I like a shower so hot it scours. I like 10 or 12 hours of sleep a night. I like double-anchovy pizza, and at that, I may salt it. If a quarter cup of bleach will whiten a load, then surely two cups will...well, experience and a look at the Breadwinner's t-shirts reveals that some fabrics are intolerant to high levels of toxicity. But they're certainly white. Dazzling.

The Breadwinner tends to be a person of moderation unless, of course, it involves a power tool. (This is a testosterone-charged area of masculine life that I won't even pretend to understand. Suffice it to say that I do not turn the Breadwinner loose with anything like a chainsaw or a hedge trimmer.) Otherwise, the Breadwinner eats moderate portions, keeps his truck moderately messy, and won't overbid on

eBay. I, on the other hand, will eat an entire box of chocolate-covered cherries at one sitting. If six dark chocolates are oh-so-pleasing, then a dozen are positively orgasmic. When I measure out Nyquil for the Breadwinner, I pour with an approximating and generous hand, then add an extra whallop for good measure. The Breadwinner likes how I take good care of him. I'm not stingy.

When I'm at the beach, I want big waves. When it rains I want an equatorial downpour. When I paint a room I don't paint it white. When I get a dog at the shelter, I get a big, ugly dog. When I marry a man, I marry a real man. When I chop up ingredients for pico de gallo, the cilantro is enough to make your eyes roll back in your head. And when a cold front blows in, I want a wind strong enough to whistle down my nose and freeze my fillings.

Which is not how I remember that hot, dry afternoon in my grandmother's back yard, hanging my laundry out on her line in a yard fragrant with her West Texas cedars. Horned toads make a pleistoic wonderland of her garden where Grandmother is picking okra to roll in cornmeal and fry up for my supper. The clothes in my basket are freshly laundered and heavy with Downy. Even the blister of the West Texas sun will not dry them stiff. I'm going to smell good this summer. I've got the best smelling clothes on the Cap Rock. I've got a grandmother who can bend on a silly little thing like Downy. She lets me use as much Downy as I want.

I take another deep breath of the dawn air and continue my walk. My Grandmother, gone for over a decade, takes up pace in my day. A little, uncharacteristic excess on her part and she's with me forever.

I think I'll go home and wash a load of clothes.