

HEART OF THE MATTER

Summer on the Farm: Ecologic Equipoise

Those of you who have read this column over the last few years may recall that I have been spending my summers on my farm in the Hudson Valley of New York State. You also may recall that we are the custodians of a 220-year-old brick house built by my wife's ancestors just after the Revolutionary War. This place is a work in progress and has been lived in and maintained by seven previous generations. As luck would have it, it is now my turn. Well it has been an experience with a seemingly endless series of critical repairs and expensive interventions.

The most recent project was the repair of the brickwork on the house that apparently has been leaking. It never occurred to me that bricks could or would leak. This led to the first challenge to the environment. I hadn't appreciated that a number of important creatures lived in those cracks. So, with the sealing of the bricks and the rebuilding of two chimneys, the nesting place of the chimney swifts and bats were surgically removed. The chimney swifts got so disturbed that two of them flew down the chimney and out the fireplace and into the living room.

I had to chase them around the living room with my grandson's butterfly net before catching them and returning them to outer space. The bats were likewise corralled when they mistakenly sought interior living. The result was that the bats and swifts disappeared in search of more hospitable living conditions and the mosquito population that had been held in check by these airborne traps gained the upper hand. We now must resort to citronella candles for survival in the evening when we sit on the porch.

The other change this summer has been the rain. Last year we lived through a drought, in fear that our well would run dry again, an experience that did not add to the hospitality afforded our overnight visitors from Detroit. This year we have had a deluge. It rained for almost 6 weeks and led to flooding to a degree short of Genesis. This year's guests were unable to leave because of the disruption in the roads and railroads, a possibility that we had never considered and found less than convenient.

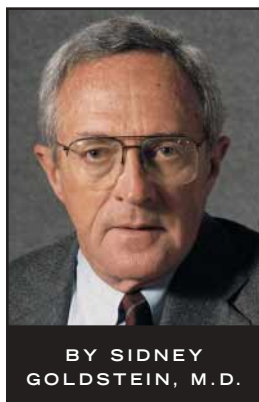
The other disturbance in the

equipoise relates to my friend Sam Phelps. You may remember him as my "crusty" octogenarian neighbor who refused an implantable defibrillator as prophylactic therapy for his heart failure. Sam is still doing pretty well and still turning out his weekly column for the Wallkill Valley Times.

But unfortunately, he suffered a stroke a few months ago, which left him almost blind. That has been a major disaster. He had been "trying to get out of here" ever since his wife died almost a decade ago. Now he is trying to figure out how to accelerate the process. His physical and emotional balance has been seriously impaired. He has a new dog though, Buffy, who gives him a lot of solace. She, too, has been going through some problems with equipoise. When I visited Sam last week, the dog was in "heat" and my friend had to watch over her to prevent an importunate visit from a male friend.

All of these events remind me of the critical point upon which our lives are balanced. It doesn't take much to change that balance for better or for worse. ■

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Physicians Urged to Apply For National Provider ID

Physicians need to apply now for a national provider identifier number to start using it in May 2007, says the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The national provider identifier (NPI) is a 10-digit number that does not expire or change; it is used to speed claims processing. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act mandates that the NPI be used for all standard health care transactions involving public and private payers starting May 23, 2007. Health plans having annual receipts of \$5 million or less have an extra year to comply.

Physicians will need to have their health care license number or certificate number and any "legacy identifiers," such as a unique physician identification number (UPIN), as well as numbers issued by Medicaid and other health plans.

To apply online for an NPI, visit <https://NPPES.cms.hhs.gov>; for a paper application, call 800-465-3203.

—Nancy Nickell

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