



In Bounds: Focus

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The Sugarin' Snow, so called because it is formed in the early spring during freeze/thaw cycles when Maple trees are tapped for their sweet bounty, was dribbled with bright red hues. Splotted in large crimson drops was my blood, in copious amounts, expressed from my now very tender nose. No, it didn't fill my olfactory glands with a taste like copper metal, but rather like blood, a rich and almost musky sensation. What on earth had I done to precipitate this event?

Lying upon the ground in a tired heap of twisted branches, the Elm tree didn't look like much of a challenge, but I was soon to discover the energy built within years of twisted growth. In fact, this particular tree had probably been growing as long as I have been felling and splitting and storing timber (wood hoarding in a compulsive behavior of mine), over the last three decades. From my perspective not a real big job, but as I was to learn, any chore requiring a chain saw demands focus and diligent attention.

On that particular day, warm southerly breezes full of odors frozen for months, the sound of a Cardinal's song claiming territory and thoughts of my daughter and her Junior Prom filled my mind and allowed for a rude awakening. For although I had properly planned my lumber attack, and wore my PPE including glasses, long pants, boots, ear muffs and tight fitting jacket, I left my "focus" in the cart.

In hindsight my preoccupation and lack of concentration started well before that afternoon of amateur woodsmanship. My wife can attest to the fact that cabin fever had caused her husband to be a bear the previous three weeks as the excitement of the season ahead had taken hold of him. The anxiety, eagerness and hope for a successful opening filled my thoughts with too much information and too few answers. Views of my teenager's options added fuel to my fire of disconnected mindful meanderings. What I needed was a "wake up" call. And man did I get it!

The branch looked innocent, only four inches in diameter and barely buried under the limb below my chin. Early analysis had dictated the cutting of small material followed by a systematic logging, in 18 inch pieces, of wood to be split for consumption at a later date. Then my mind went on cruise control, starting with course opening ideas and then lapsing into thoughts both happy and sad for my

daughter was now a young woman and gone were the days of Daddy, finger paints and pony camp. Cart traffic, independence, boys, course cleaning, Prom

dance, boys, irrigation fire up, phone calls, boys and winter damage attracted my attention away from the task at hand.

Reaching carefully, both hands and the chainsaw under the limb, now situated below my nose, I squeezed the throttle of the power tool, felt the rush of energy and then descended the bar upon the innocuous branch. The next thing I recall was a flash of monumental distraction as my nose exploded with numbing consciousness. Backing away from my project, muzzle in hand and thoughts suddenly, and quite oddly, upon Marsha Brady and her broken nose, I carefully regrouped myself and considered the immediate ramifications.

Why wasn't my nose, now tingly to the touch and much more visible under my right eye, bleeding? That mystery was quickly solved when I leaned over and preformed a farmer luugy onto a nearby snow bank. Impressive and abstract is the only way I can describe the blood blot pattern created upon the clean white canvas of snow.

What had happened? Grabbing a handful of coarse flakes and setting my butt upon my cart, leaning over in a hunched fashion to direct the continuous flow of blood off of my clothing, I thought about the near concussive event caused by my removing an overlying branch thus allowing a secondary reaction of a rather large limb to fly straight up and into my beak. With improvised ice pack in hand and on snout, I reflected upon the last five minutes and deduced that one; I am a lucky dog in that I didn't lose my eyes or front teeth; two, a "split second" is a conscious and quantifiable moment only after you have experienced one and three, considering all the thoughts running through my limited mind I needed to evaluate my mental processes.

Briefly I thanked my lucky stars that my position over the limb was not one inch different in any direction or I would have sustained a serious injury. An inch lower and my nose bridge would have been crushed into pieces between my eyes. An inch higher and my front teeth, the ones straightened through almost five years of orthodontics, would have disintegrated. Fortunately for me, the wooden messenger glanced across the fleshy tip of my nose, displacing some cartilage, and eventually producing one short term shiner. A brief reminder that time sometimes

passes so fast it is immeasurable.

Have you ever been involved in an actual split second action? Until that afternoon, rich with hints of green grass and the appearance of knotweed along the heat sink of the driveway into my shop, I had not. Sure I have been in vehicular accidents, close calls and near misses, but I recall that each incident was foreshadowed with a hint of what was to come. Never had I measured time in fractions, or instantaneously for that matter.

"Faster than the blink of an eye, quick as greased lightning, the snap of a finger and abracadabra", are terms that refer to events which happen without a hint of time spaciousness. Obviously my life has been in slow motion for none of these phrases refer to the quickness of my accident. Man oh man, did that tree jump at me fast!

Or perhaps I jumped at that tree too fast? No, not physically, but rather I didn't take the time and prepare myself mentally and focus on my chore. I wasn't in the game and allowed the accident to happen through my own carelessness.

Upon reflection I realized that through managing and functioning on intellectual overload, I was skipping things. To ease this 'spring mania', my higher power had sent me a strong message, "Wake up, step back, be patient, breath and take things at a more gradual pace. RELAX! FOCUS! Or else!" Hmmm, after what happened I can only wonder what exactly an "or else" could be!

As the throbbing of my nose became a slow rhythm I relaxed and thought about what I could let go to clear my mind and concentrate upon the critical job I was doing. Am I powerful enough to control my daughter's views, aspirations or actions? Nope, not hers or anyone else's. Honestly, isn't it pure arrogance to think I can really control the player's cart driving skills, their self regulation of divots and ball mark repairs and litter disposal. And beyond some preventative measures, I really am at the mercy of nature's whim when it comes to winter damage. Why was I vacillating in thought about things I had no control over. My job is to set by example and help clean up the detritus after life's events occur.

Ten minutes later I was once again working on my project. Even the slow drip of mucosal blood from my nose, as I continued cutting upon the Elm tree, did not distract me from my new and focused mission. I was living the present and mastering the moment without a mind cluttered with ideas I had no charge of. Peace was once again with me as I cranked up the RPM's of the chainsaw and tore into the limb that may cost me nasal reconstruction further down the road of life.