

Broomsticks

The house provided for our use when I took care of the water inlets for the city of Bend, in central Oregon, stood three miles from the nearest neighbor, at 5,000 feet elevation, on Tumalo Mountain, near the confluence of Bridge Creek and Tumalo Creek. Snow piled deep on the mountain that winter. The temperature dropped below zero, and we were reluctant to go outside much. If we put on skis, we rocketed down the side of the mountain and then had to labor mightily to climb back up. If we didn't put on skis, we sank into snow thigh deep and labored mightily to make forward progress, with nowhere but more snowed-over ground to labor to.

Juniper and Amanda were children then and pursued their education at home. We had many books, a piano for Amanda, and a violin for Juniper. We all had plenty of mental stimulation, but we began to want more physical activity.

My thought on any new adventure is, begin. Once we begin, we have something to revise, to evolve from until we find exactly what we need. I went to the basement and got two broomsticks.

I climbed back up the stairs and handed one broomstick to Juniper. "You take this one, and I'll use this one. We'll start and see how it works, and we'll change whatever we need to change, including who holds the broomsticks. The point is, never hurt each other, but push broomstick against broomstick. You attempt to maneuver me and throw me off balance, like Robin Hood and Little John on the narrow bridge. You gain a

point or whatever we decide, if you throw me off balance, or if you reach past my defense and touch me with your broomstick. Or the other way around, I throw you off balance or touch you with my broomstick.”

Juniper and I parried, feinted, clacked broomsticks together and pushed each other around the living room. She backed me toward the south wall, then thrust upward and threw me off balance. I stepped backward to catch my balance, and I knocked the floor lamp into the wall and down onto the floor. Two of the glass shades broke and scattered glass shards across the carpet. We stood quietly a moment. I said, “We probably can’t replace those, because that lamp is ancient.” I looked at Laura, the mother and wife and the usual household and possessions manager. She had already decided to let Juniper and me handle the situation. That was both a relief and a responsibility.

Juniper and I argued about whose fault the wreck of the lamp was.

“It’s my fault..I ran into it and knocked it over.”

“No..It’s my fault, because I maneuvered you close to it and then attacked, so you had to duck, and that’s when you ran into it.”

“Arguing about it isn’t getting us anywhere.”

“No, it isn’t..I think we’re both at fault..We’d better clean it up.” All four of us agreed the lamp was, after all, only a material object, which still worked, and actually gave more light without the shades, even though it wasn’t as pretty as it used to be..We cleaned up the broken glass and got back to the activity at hand, more aware that we needed to avoid areas where anything breakable resided or move breakables to safe places.

Sometimes, both people grasped one broomstick and tried to push the other off balance or into a particular place..Using one stick eliminated the striking part of the sport, which was better when any of us developed a timid moment. We loved the activity. Size or strength didn't necessarily win, because agility counted for a lot..Mother and child vied, and father and child, and child and child, and mother and father, and the smallest could win against the largest.

Snow skidded down hard wind and piled deeper. We played our game of broomsticks and several new games that evolved from our realization that we didn't actually live in a house but in a small gymnasium. We realized new possibilities for indoor activities that brought us close together in strenuous activity. Anyone who didn't want to participate in the game of the moment declared a safe area that the participants respected. Non-participants got around by calling out "safe passage" and then proceeding to where they wanted to be.

Our activities raised dust, but we already knew the carpet needed cleaning, and the dust stimulated us to clean it soon and thoroughly. Moments of winter boredom still sometimes poked up their heads, but we broomsticked them out through the front door and kept our moods active and inspired.

When spring came to the mountain, we sought adventures outdoors, without broomsticks. We weren't as full of cabin fever as we would have been if we hadn't found and pursued vigorous physical activity indoors.