

## 9-21-12 Public Health Is Everywhere

When my son, Eric, was an infant, he had this delightful habit of expressing his joy upon both leaving the house and returning to it. Did he sense my similar emotions? I did not have a vehicle until I was expecting him, my fifth child! This was a great luxury and ticket to freedom, to be able to get in that vehicle and go the food store or pick up children at school. It didn't matter; it was all an adventure! Out of my six children, he was the only one who would grin and exclaim one little happy, "Yay!" when we left and then, "Yay!" when approaching that front door. He was happy to leave and happy to return.

I think of Eric whenever I leave for a little rest and recreation. While I did not have the preferable week for a journey, I did have a few days. That's better than nothing; so I took it and said, "Yay!"

So, off I went to see some siblings in Maine, even though Eastern Equine encephalitis (EEE) and West Nile virus (WNV) was at its peak back at home. If the dispatchers or DPH needed me; they had my cell phone number.

My arrival in Cape Elizabeth, ME, was met by newspaper articles on EEE. That's a new issue for that area. I recalled talking to my brother about it some years ago and he said, "It's a non-issue here." I hope the ME DPH will stay in touch with the MA DPH to learn from those with more experience. There's a lot to learn and a lot to do!

My next morning's newspaper greeted me with the headlines of three prominent waterfront food establishments being "shut down" by the local health inspector because of rats and flies. We ate in. My family knows how to cook. Health agents tend to like it that way.

On my third day in Maine, I received a text from a Massachusetts friend. Her twenty six year old daughter had "flu-like symptoms" of muscle aches and joint pain and she also had a severe headache. Her mother was very nervous, knowing that her daughter had received several mosquito bites during the last week and knew that Massachusetts was at its peak for EEE and WNV. We talked and the next day her daughter's condition improved. The worst fear of EEE was over but she needed a diagnosis. I'll tell you later how that transpired.

In addition to eating good food with good people, and having some great laughs with razzing, recounting and re-enacting family stories, I did actually get outside for a little exploring. A visit to wonderful local beaches at Kettle Cove and Willard Beach were in order. The weather was picture perfect. The bay was full of sail boats. I collected some driftwood and a few stones. I bowed to an unknown Grammy and her wave-dancing, dress-holding five-year-old princess. Oh, to be five again!

I accompanied my sister in law, Stephanie, to the local, and my favorite, recycling center, where everything is so clearly marked with great signage: sheetrock, windows & doors, ashes,

oil, concrete, metal; you name it. And then....and then there's a huge, well-organized swap shop! Next to the swap shop, Goodwill also collects and picks up. It's great!

It was time for another dose of nature and it is so easy to find it in the Portland area. Stephanie and I had a few hours before her next parenting responsibility for my nephew, Jack, and she suggested Macworth Island. I had never been; let's go! Donated to the state by Governor Percival Baxter in 1946, this 100 acre preserve is home to the Governor Baxter School for the Deaf and that explained all the labs we met along the one and ¼ mile walk around the island. They were foster parents and trainers of dogs for the students.

When I next visit the Portland, ME area, this place is on the list of places to visit again. It is surrounded by gorgeous, amazing views of Portland and Casco Bay, with boats and ferries dotting the glistening water. Huge rocks and old driftwood trees make their homes along the shores, with well marked stairs indicating access to the beach. The forest is inhabited with hundreds of lovingly built fairy houses and a dog cemetery for Gov. Baxter's many Irish Setters.

On my way home I listened to the Prairie Home Companion, having missed it the night before. Garrison Keillor, always informed and up to the minute, with twists and turns added to the truth, included a story about a man who was isolated due to his level of radio activity, and who was worried that maybe he had contracted West Nile virus from his Egyptian cat. Funny how he can get away with joking about close-to-realities!

When I arrived home, I smiled, thinking of Eric saying "Yay!" It was good to be home. Some of the hummingbirds were still here. The monarchs were busy migrating. My plants needed watering.

I knew that public health was at work everywhere and that is a good thing! It was good to leave and see public health from another perspective and then it was good to be home.

*Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax, MA. You can tell her your stories of travel and health at 781 293 6768 or [cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us](mailto:cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us)*