**AUTUMN “NUTS”**

Ka-plink, ker-plop, ka-bang. I sit at the kitchen table, nicely nestled into a sunny bay window which affords a good view of the backyard. I listen to the recurring autumnal symphony provided by acorns dropping from the oak trees that surround our home. Squirrels scurry and scamper, each rushing to stuff its cheeks with as many nuts as possible, before another does. They are in all-out winter preparation mode and these sounds foretell a bumper crop. I marvel at the squirrels’ efficiency and purposefulness, especially as contrasted to my lack of either.

Even the oracles of astrology seem to have noticed. One daily horoscope cautions: “It’s important for you to remain organized. You have so much going on right now that you need to stay focused.” I’m not sure what I have going on, but I agree I need to regain some focus and get organized. The other horoscope is less kindly: “If you are more motivated to partake in inessential activities than in serious endeavors, don’t expect to get anything important done.” Ouch! Ouch! Ouch! That was direct.

Dr. Oz, the charismatic TV host, was quoted in an AARP Magazine article: “… Among the major stressors in our lives are Nagging Unfinished Tasks (NUTs).” Unlike acorns, these NUTs collect in the back of our minds, generating anxiety and sucking energy and focus from our days. Of course, in retirement, it’s nice to have some leeway to meander, and not move as quickly as we once did. But I’m starting to realize that since we’ve returned from our cross-country trip this summer, I’m feeling somewhat overwhelmed and rudderless. Could it be because of an ever accumulating basket of NUTs?

We all have them, of course, and they never totally go away—even as one is checked off the list, another is forming. But after a summer away, I seem to have accumulated more NUTs than usual. All the ones I left behind in July are still there, plus all the ones that accumulated over the summer. Even more have gathered since our return home. And the more they pile up, the more I seem to stumble upon distractions (aka “inessential activities”) that have become barriers to truly accomplishing anything. Unlike the squirrels’, my bumper crop of NUTs feels more burden than bounty.

I consider Dr. Oz’s caution about not confronting our NUTs and realize that my dallying is no longer feeling good; rather, it’s a form of denial and escape from my growing anxiety. My horoscope is right! I DO need to get focused and I do need to stop directing so much effort into non-essential activities. I’m unused to a summer off and realize I’ve totally lost any kind of rhythm to my days. I still want to have time to linger over coffee at the kitchen table, but I don’t like the niggling anxiety that’s starting to arise. As I continue to transition into retirement, I am starting to understand the need to consciously re-create the structure of my days and life so that I deal with the NUTs, while still accommodating my desire for time to just “be.” It is autumn—a good time to get back on track, prioritize what needs to be done, clean up my office work area, break tasks down into their components, make some lists and start making some progress, little by little, one day at a time. To do otherwise would just drive me, well…NUTS!