

Wisdom means looking at things with new perspective, despite age

Lubbock Avalanche-Journal

Saturday, February 28, 2009

Story last updated at 2/28/2009 - 2:36 am

Listen to voices of wisdom, which contrary to our expectations, may live in the young as well as the old. It took a word from a wise 11-year-old to teach this Granny the value of perspective about household challenges.

We were driving home from a Lady Raiders' basketball game on a Saturday afternoon. I don't remember how the conversation turned to housekeeping.

"Now, Granny," she said, "I can tell you your house is cleaner than just about any house I ever see. Quit worrying about upstairs. Just think of it as the attic."

An apt description. My workroom is a bonafide mess of papers, giftwrap materials, family photos, art supplies, furniture, and anything else I needed to stash away during the 25 years I spent driving back and forth to work at the Avalanche-Journal.

Get some perspective, she was telling me. Think of the room as the attic and don't let the task overwhelm you.

No one, other than the man of the house, expects an attic to be perfectly straight, and he's getting accustomed to disappointment.

Every time I get an urge to tackle the job, I realize windows need washing, carpets need vacuuming or bathrooms could use a good scrub. I'm a wizard at avoiding what I don't want to do.

I also find days (and nights) when a book needs reading more than the house needs cleaning or the meals need cooking.

For me, reading is the greatest pleasure afforded human beings. I call it the ultimate energizer, feeding mind and soul.

A good writer can open the boundaries of geography, education, religion and ethnicity. We vicariously experience life in all its diversity through the best storytellers.

Abraham Verghese is this kind of writer.

His third book is an epic novel titled "Cutting for Stone," published in 2009 by Alfred A. Knopf. If you are going on a cross-country drive, you might like to find the audio version.

In terms of writing quality, this is the best novel I have read in a long time, maybe since my favorite John Irving novel, "A Prayer for Owen Meany." Verghese's attention to detail is phenomenal, but never tiresome.

Dr. Verghese's first two books, "The Tennis Partner" and "My Own Country" were nonfiction and rightly earned acclaim.

I interviewed him once about medical ethics while he was a member of the faculty at the El Paso campus of Texas Tech's medical school. He is one of the most courteous and interesting people I have ever interviewed.

Dr. Verghese later became founding director of the Center for Medical Humanities & Ethics at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio, where he is now an adjunct professor.

He lives in Palo Alto, Calif. and is professor and senior associate chair for the theory and practice of medicine at Stanford University. He also is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

Verghese is a storyteller of the first magnitude as well as a scientist. I'm glad I took time out from cleaning to read this one.

BETH PRATT *retired as religion editor from The Avalanche-Journal after 25 years. You can e-mail her at beth.pratt@cheerful.com.*