

Hammock Man: "The price is \$10. But I must warn you. This is no ordinary hammock. Its webbing is a mesh of comfort and evil."

Homer: "You had me at hello."

TWO YEARS AGO, my daughter and I were wandering through Centennial Square during FolkFest when a display of cotton-weave hammocks from Brazil caught our eye. Hammock Man (in this case, a young guy from Whistler) invited us to test-drive the one he had set up. I declined. While I could concede that hammocks made a nice-looking accessory to a 1940s kind of garden décor, I more firmly suspected them of being uncomfortable, unstable and, like mechanical bulls, overrated.

The reason we were giving them any attention at all was that my husband's birthday was coming up. He did not share my views on the hammock. Indeed, he was inordinately keen to have one of his very own.

"The price is \$89," said Hammock Guy. "And I take Visa." He bundled a blue, orange and yellow hammock into a bag, uttering not a word of warning.

A week later the hammock was installed in our backyard, strung between two oaks that looked like they'd been planted 50 years before to serve this very purpose. My husband swung himself aboard, pronounced it "great" and dozed off for what would be the first of many suspended summer siestas.

Within a few days, this proved to be no ordinary hammock. Everyone — adults, teens, young children, small dogs — seemed unable to resist its call. A tight cotton weave and generous size meant it could support several kids at once, or one accompanied by a pile of books and magazines. Invariably, when people relaxed into its cocooning embrace, they let out a long sigh — the sort of

sigh a person easing into a hot tub or submitting to a massage therapist makes.

I was the only one who had no interest in it, even after seeing no one dumped. To my mind, hammocks made sense for: (a) people on a lolling-about kind of vacation; (b) people with plenty of free time; or (c) people for whom the weekend afternoon nap is a moral imperative (my husband's category). I was none of those.

But, as already noted, this was no ordinary hammock. One afternoon in late July when I was working at home alone, I left my office and went out into the garden for a short break. It was a classic mid-summer day: hot, still, filled with the thrumming of a thousand insect wings. The unoccupied hammock summoned. **What** harm in trying it out for a few minutes? I got in and stretched out full length. Not bad, I had to admit. A sigh may even have escaped my lips. Lying there and looking up at the blue sky through a canopy of leaves, I thought I'd take advantage of the quiet moment to think through a work problem, compose a grocery list, plan how to get my bike in for repairs and the old printer cartridges out for recycling all in one trip . . .

Too late I realized the hammock was erasing my powers of concentration, scrambling my mental plotting abilities and generally messing with my driven self. Puffballs of cloud floated overhead, benignly distracting. The harder I tried to focus on something concrete, the faster the wisps of thought dispersed. All those things that so desperately needed doing minutes earlier shuffled off in defeat. From this position I was gazing up and outward from the planet for a change, not squinting across its surface through the dust of self-inflicted bustle. By the time I was watching catfish jump and cotton grow high, I knew the ringing phone could wait. **It was** a defining summer moment.

SUSPENDED ANIMATION

The hammock cure for stress relief

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