

‘Hello, I’m Calling From the IRS’

That’s not a phone message you want to hear

BY FAY JACOBS | ILLUSTRATION BY ROB WATERS

My fifth book was titled “Fried & Convicted.” Just a fun title, meaning nothing. But could that become my reality?

Last March the IRS contacted me, saying I owed them over \$3,500 plus big fines and accumulating interest. They accused me of failing to report \$60,000 in income in 2018. Failure to pay up could send me up the river to the Big House for tax evasion.

Whoa. Not only do I look terrible in orange, but trying to hide \$60,000 in income would have required the Amazing Kreskin. In 2018, my entire freelance writing biz made only a fraction of that amount. I know, pathetic, isn’t it? And the 1099 document they were citing reported my gargantuan earnings from a client as a mere \$600.

So this raised the \$60,000 question: What \$60,000?

Instantly, horror stories of the relentless IRS completely ruining innocent lives played in my head. People losing their homes, their careers, and having their paychecks garnished. Do you also picture sliced lemons and limes when you hear about garnishing wages?

Or how about those slick TV ads for companies that are paid handsomely to get the IRS off customers’ backs? I’d watch

those and cluck my tongue thinking the customers should have paid the tax in the first place. Now I feel awful. Maybe their wretched \$600 in income was also turned into \$60,000 by IRS auditor Mr. Magoo.

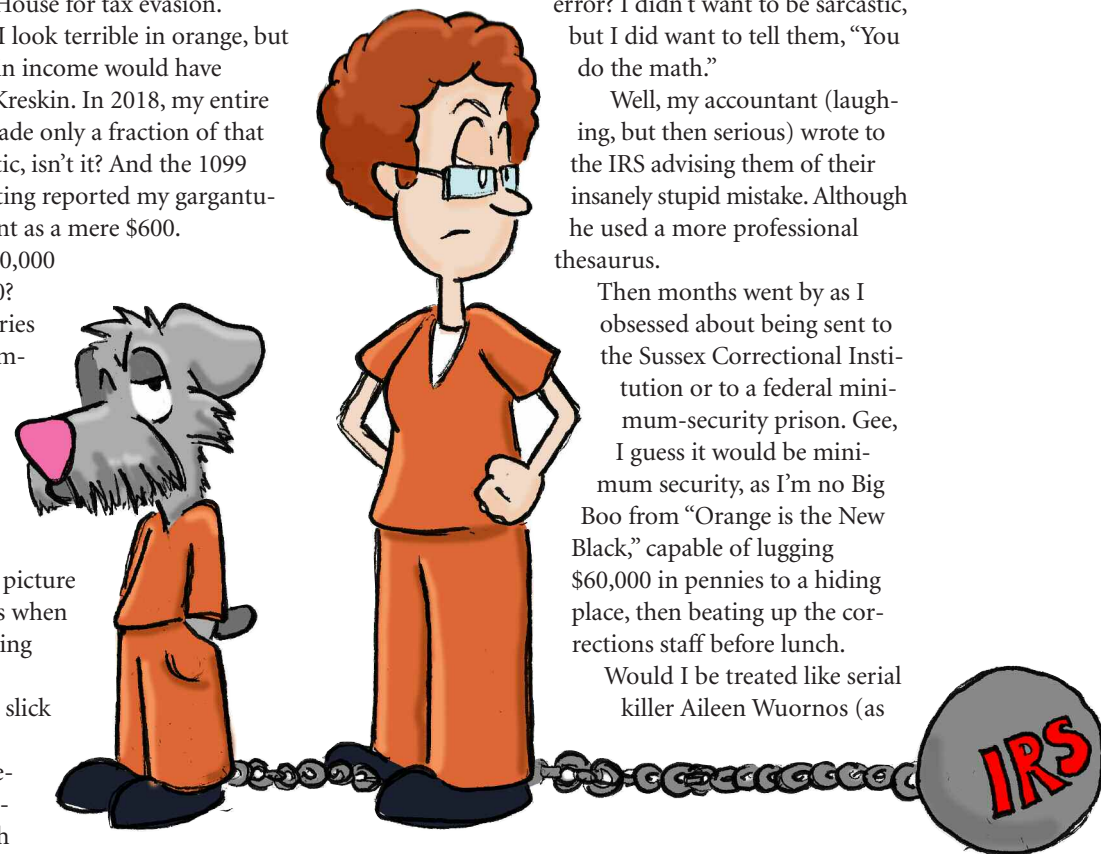
OK, keep calm. How do you tell the IRS they’ve diddled with a decimal point and their bean-counters perpetrated a ridiculous \$59,400

error? I didn’t want to be sarcastic, but I did want to tell them, “You do the math.”

Well, my accountant (laughing, but then serious) wrote to the IRS advising them of their insanely stupid mistake. Although he used a more professional thesaurus.

Then months went by as I obsessed about being sent to the Sussex Correctional Institution or to a federal minimum-security prison. Gee, I guess it would be minimum security, as I’m no Big Boo from “Orange is the New Black,” capable of lugging \$60,000 in pennies to a hiding place, then beating up the corrections staff before lunch.

Would I be treated like serial killer Aileen Wuornos (as



played by my crush Charlize Theron), or suffer like Tim Robbins in the “Shawshank Redemption,” excavating the concrete prison wall with a spoon? Did he use a teaspoon or a soup spoon? Do people really hide shivs in cakes? Why do I even know the word shiv?

For months, my imagination ran wild. Then, when I had run out of prison films to obsess over and nightmare scenarios to envision, I finally got another letter from the IRS. They told me they received my CPA’s letter (good), and (wait for it) they’d decided nothing. Bupkis. Nada. It was still under review. By whom? A fourth-grader with arithmetic issues?

They’d used a postage stamp to tell me they’d done absolutely zip. But here’s the kicker: If I thought I would owe them money when they finally did get around to making a decision, they warned me to pay up now because the clock was ticking on interest. Beasts!

I wrestled with what to do, but ultimately did not send them one more cent, though I’m sure they thought I had 59,999 more pennies stashed in my shed.

Time marched on, when finally, this morning, thanks to a 9 a.m. email from USPS Informed Delivery Service, I learned I would have an IRS letter in my mailbox today — at about 4 o’clock. Now ordinarily I don’t mind this teasing service, but today it just made me nuts. Should I troll the area, hunting down my mailperson to hijack my delivery? Should I knock myself out for the next seven hours?

Well, finally, nearing cocktail hour the mail arrived. The official IRS missive said simply, “We are pleased to tell you that the information you provided resolved this tax issue. You owe \$0.00 and this case is now closed.” The good news was if they screwed with the decimal point this time, the amount owed would remain the same.

Whееee! No fines. No interest. No jail. I’m going to pour myself a large cocktail. I may get good and fried, but at least I won’t be convicted. ■

Fay Jacobs is the author of five award-winning humor books, including “For Frying Out Loud — Rehoboth Beach Diaries,” “Time Fries — Aging Gracelessly in Rehoboth,” and “Fried & Convicted — Rehoboth Beach Uncorked.”

Gallery One

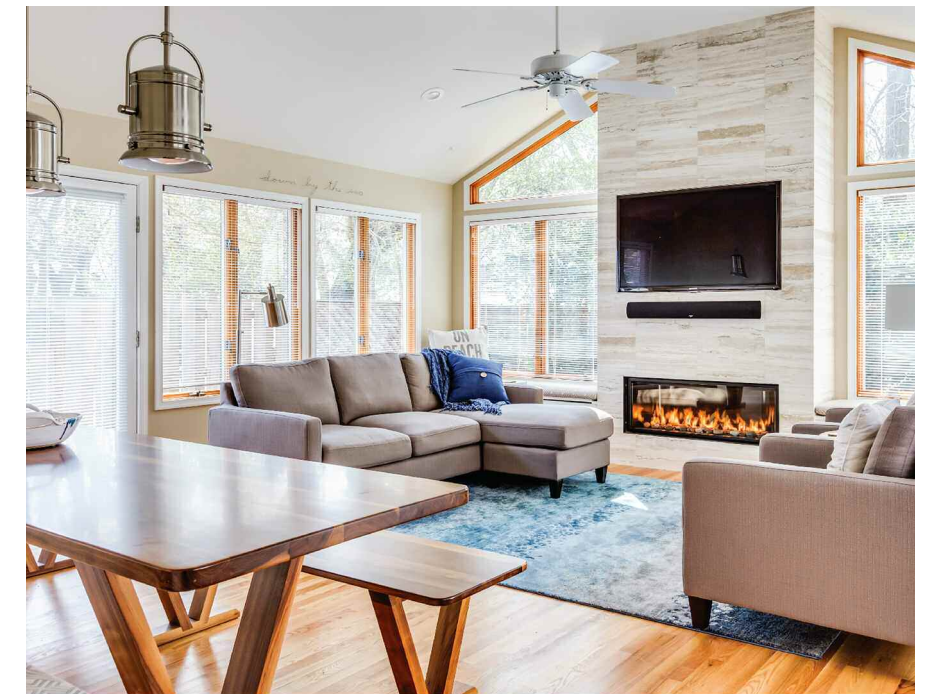
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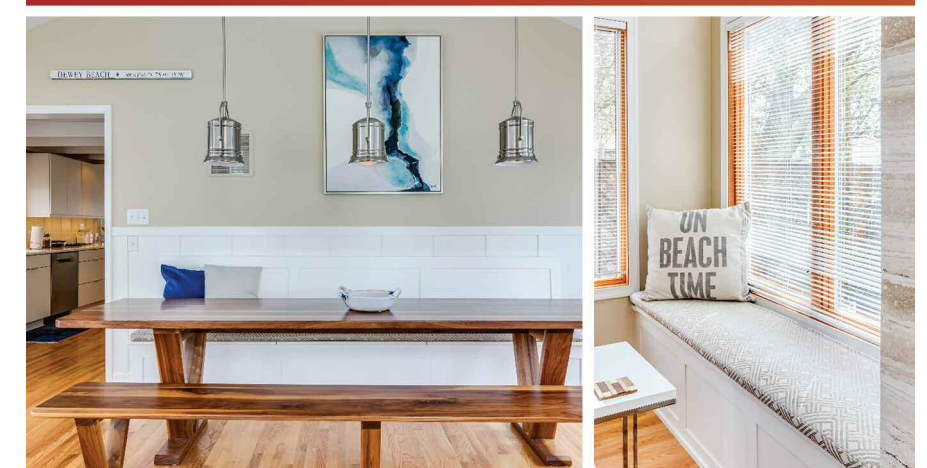
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Schnauzer Supermodel

A happy ending for one end of Windsor

BY FAY JACOBS | ILLUSTRATION BY ROB WATERS

My dog is fine. Now.

And I suspect this column may be slightly more scatological than usual, but I will try to be delicate.

One evening my schnauzer Windsor appeared to need Preparation H. Ewwww. OK, that's probably the most descriptive I'm getting.

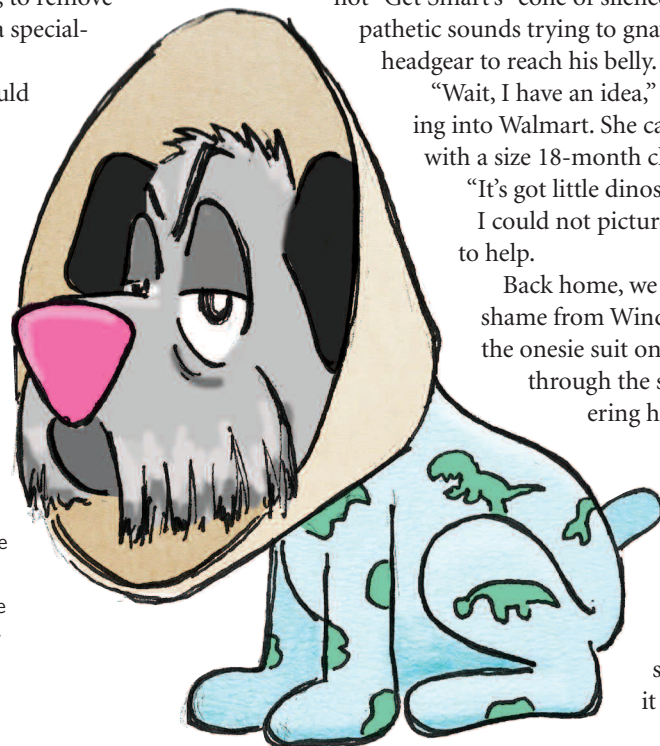
We agreed that his, um, symptom, was not life-threatening, and calmly agreed to wait until morning to see the vet. Ten seconds later we completely freaked out and rushed to the 24-hour clinic.

After waiting in the car for an hour in the dead of night (COVID, you know), and authorizing every kind of test, including an ultrasound, we eventually learned that our poor boy had a large polyp in his colon, situated quite near the end of the trolley line. And, to remove it, he needed abdominal surgery at a specialized clinic. Oy.

But before the surgeons there could perform the operation, Windsor would need (wait for it) ... a colonoscopy.

Seriously???? We were so dumbstruck it took us a few minutes to realize the enormity of the task before us.

"And if you think you despise drinking that prep stuff,



dogs hate it more," said the vet tech. My imagination went wild. What do I do, squirt the goop down his gullet with a water gun? And then what? Ewwww! A literal &#*% show.

But as fortune and our carpets would have it, Windsor was invited to the hospital and given twilight drugs so he could dream of Snausages while a nasal tube delivered the medication. And blessedly, what happened next at the vet stayed at the vet. But it occurred to me that simultaneously, both my dog and my bank account were totally cleaned out.

Once the docs had a pristine playing field, the patient was ready for his close-up, Mr. DeMille. The polyp was surgically removed and a woozy Windsor was discharged wearing a massive plastic cone around his neck and head. A dog's instinct to lick his wounds is primordial. So it was not "Get Smart's" cone of silence, as the dog made pathetic sounds trying to gnaw his way out of the headgear to reach his belly.

"Wait, I have an idea," my spouse said, turning into Walmart. She came back to the car with a size 18-month children's onesie outfit.

"It's got little dinosaurs on it," she said. I could not picture how this was going to help.

Back home, we removed the cone of shame from Windsor's head, slipped the onesie suit on him, front paws through the sleeves, the shirt covering his back and belly, and snapping at his caboose. We fastened two of the four posterior snaps, leaving the center open for his stubby little tail to stick out. I have to say, it was adorable.

And I think he was

so shocked to be wearing a dinosaur suit that for the entire two weeks after surgery, he pranced around like a supermodel on the runway and never once tried to investigate his belly wound. We even got the little fashionista additional outfits, including a Phillies uniform and an "I Love Rehoboth" onesie.

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When the vet called and asked us to email her a photo of his incision to make sure it didn't look infected, we complied. But I panicked. If I emailed a photo of my male dog's torso, was I sexting? I flashed back to the Anthony Weiner (unfortunate name) scandal and wondered if Windsor or I would get the jail time. And I kept checking my mail for valentines from girl schnauzers.

Of course, the best news is that Windsor is well. But almost as great is the fact that we had a pet insurance policy. Heads up: pet medical care is expensive — as it should be for the expert care they need and get.

But a pet insurance plan for a young dog or cat is relatively inexpensive — and get this, it paid 80 percent (less a \$300 deductible) of the entire hit to my credit card, which, by the way, cost as much as a used Buick. It was easy to file a claim and we got paid back very fast. My insurance company could take a lesson.

So Windsor reports that his parents felt as much relief for having the insurance as he did for having lost a polyp. And face it, would a well-dressed sleeping dog lie? ■

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Coming Out of the COVID Closet

I'm having fun, but this time I can't stay up quite as late

BY FAY JACOBS | ILLUSTRATION BY ROB WATERS

I know about coming out. But I never thought I'd be doing essentially the same thing twice in my life. But my emergence from COVID quarantine feels pretty much like 1979 when I first came out of the closet, eventually moving to Rehoboth, or as I call it, Gayberry, RFD.

In 1979, as I joyously found my way, I burned the candle at both ends, going from D.C. dance clubs to gay bars to dinner parties. I kept repeating "I'm so happy to be out, to feel at home and join the party!"

Now my mantra is "I'm so happy to leave home, and be out with family and friends again!" I know the pandemic isn't entirely over, but with vaccinations, things are starting to normalize.

All summer long I re-emerged with a vengeance, meeting up with friends, laughing, drinking adult beverages, and dining inside (!) on our awesome coastal cuisine. This coming out is a delight.

Although there are differences. Back in the day, we used to come home on Saturday night when it was already getting light out. Now, we're home by 8:45 p.m. when it hasn't even gotten dark yet. Instead of a disco nap, to prep for a second wave of midnight clubbing, the only place we go for the after-party is Club Duvet. Z-Z-Z.

My neighborhood, the Greenwich Connecticut of Trailer Parks, had an adult swim night recently. It was a disco pool party, where thanks to Abba and the Bee Gees I was a literal dancing queen. While it felt exactly like 1979 from 7 to 10 p.m., 42 years ago I didn't take Ibuprofen before bed or rise requiring hip replacements.

Frankly, while a lot of things have changed since the old days, lots of other things changed just in the 15 months of our COVID lockdown. Zoom went mainstream. Didn't you love

Zooming with the family for holidays and birthdays?

You know, it's basically just an old-fashioned seance. Hello? Aunt Mary? Can hear me? Just tap the mute button. No, just unmute. Hands on the table, get the Ouija board, Just tap if you're here. It was like trying to make contact with the dead.

Shopping this week, I discovered that during our confinement Best Buy replaced all the paper signs attached to their wares with mini-tablets announcing price and product details. Digital R Them.

Likewise, while we hid out at home, many restaurants decided to ditch germy hand-held menus. Now we get a picture on the table of a squiggly square made up of a lot of



little squares, requiring us to scan the squiggles with our phones so we can see the menu on the restaurant's web page.

Great, just when we get people to put down their phones for a relaxing dinner, we need to pick them up to learn the specials. I'd been avoiding understanding these QR codes for years, but now I must use them to get my nachos. We Luddites are an endangered species.

Actually, I'm worried about our entire human species. Between grammar nullification in texts, talking with emojis and the use of QR codes it's like we're going back to the language skills cavepeople used to write on grotto walls. The heck with new math, hieroglyphics is the new English.

And speaking of language, while we were doing time at home, the word "chillax" was added to the Oxford Dictionary. I guess I was chillaxing with Netflix and didn't know it. Another word added while we hunkered down was "whatev," an abbreviated whatever, as in "I have no time for chillaxing, but whatev." An additional "er" needed to go away?

Another added word is freegan, defined as a person who rejects consumerism and seeks to improve the environment by avoiding waste. It's admirable. A freegan seeks discarded goods and food. I don't know about you, but we used to call these people cheap. Or

hobos. But I agree that it's better to call a person a freegan than a dumpster diver. But whatev.

Additional words gaining entry to the dictionary in 2020 are "defund" (ugh) and the catchphrase "simples" ("If you love *Delaware Beach Life*, subscribe. Simples!").

A lot has changed in the last 15 months, and hopefully the COVID pandemic will continue to wane and become history. Listen, I know the old adage is "you can't go home again," but you sure can *leave* home again. And all summer long I've had a blast diving back into real life.

Our Delaware beach towns, with their award-winning restaurants, music, retail and attractions are back. I'm loving it. I'm partaking of it all. And I'm especially thankful for getting together again with the people I care about. I've got a lot of catching up to do.

I'm shooting for a healthy balance

between chillaxing and whatev. Simples. ■

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