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Dark and Stormy

Dave Birley

What a beautiful morning. First sunlight was slicing across the North face of Mount St. Helens as Brian looked out through his window toward the clusters of pines and fir trees on its lower slopes. He thought back those ten years when he was able to lead tourists through the Ape Caves in the summer time. He loved to entertain them with stories of how this beautiful mountain had been born tens of thousands of years ago. He knew that there was what the experts call “activity” a century ago, but mercifully it was now very quiet, and only occasionally woke up with a small tremor.

In the winter, he liked to show off his athletic prowess as a ski guide and take people up the snow-covered upper levels. The nice thing about St. Helens was that it wasn't quite as big as Rainier and so neither as overloaded with tourists nor as intimidating to ski. Frankly, back then when he was in peak condition, he liked to take off his jacket so he could impress the young ladies with his washboard abs while he did his trick skiing routines. He always thought it was funny when a little tremor would loosen a bunch of snow into a mini-avalanche. He knew that it would never amount to anything, but it might give the girls a bit of a scare.

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But that was ten years ago, 1970. Now he was coping with ROAMO, a little acronym which he found ironically similar to ROTFLMAO – but nothing like it in meaning. Rapid Onset Adult Male Obesity was quite rare and treatment for it was not only hard to find, it was prohibitively expensive. When it started for him, he rapidly found that he could no longer navigate the Ape Caves in the summer or even stand up on his skis in the winter. Over those ten years he packed on almost three hundred additional pounds and could barely walk from his bedroom-office to the kitchen. Now all he could do

for the tourists was function as unofficial mayor of the little community of Cougar and offer touristy suggestions for things to do.

Fortunately, he had inherited a modest estate that enabled him to keep the roof over his head and food in his pantry, but, living alone, all he had was his memories of those days when he was the object of attention and affection by the pretty tourist girls. He had heard the warnings by the experts that the mountain was getting frisky again, but he had heard those so many times that he no longer paid them any attention. His good friend, Harry Truman, no, that's wrong, Harry R. Truman, told him that this type of palaver had been going on for decades before Brian had even first arrived in Cougar, and there was no way Harry was going to leave his little home by Spirit Lake. "We are the true spirit of the mountain," he used to say. "Ain't nobody going to get me to run away from it."

42 Around eight o'clock, Brian decided it was time to brew up and he loaded up his Mr. Coffee with his favorite blend. He thought it was odd that there were a couple of slightly stronger tremors than he had felt lately, but nothing to get excited about. He looked out the kitchen window again, and as he reached for his mug of coffee the explosion occurred. Brian never really knew what hit him. His home was right in the middle of the blast zone, and as he staggered back he thought, "Poor Harry, he'll never know what..."