

Scars are evidence of a life well-lived

William L. Spence/Lewiston Tribune

Put this down as yet another stupid male fantasy, but I'm convinced I could romance more women if I had better scars.

Maybe if I had a few bullet holes in the torso, ... a thin facial scar from that knife fight in Bali, ... claw marks down my forearm.

Would that be so bad? Step up to the bar next to some smokin' brunette, casually flexing my muscles. "Oh, that? Yeah, got that rescuing my girlfriend's puppy from a hungry polar bear. I had to slap it around, show it who's boss. She's gone now - the girlfriend, I mean. What's your name?"

Score.

As regrets go, I suppose that's a pretty tame one. It's not like a few hanging chads kept me out of the White House. It's not like I threw a goal-line interception with 20 seconds left to lose the Super Bowl.

Still, missing a finger or two might be kinda cool.

Several years ago, my nephew got banged up in a car accident. My sister was in a panic about the cut on his nose, wondering if she should consult with a plastic surgeon. I sent her a note telling her to "back away and leave the scar alone."

I think women react differently to minor disfigurement than men, at least when the injury involves them or their kids. They see scars as a blemish, something that mars the perfection of their darling child or their own bodies.

For guys, a well-earned scar is better than a tattoo. It's a badge of honor, something to be cherished, something to tell stories about. Scars are a sign of a life well-lived.

I thought about that the other day during a floor debate when Boise Rep. Mat Erpelding mentioned that the longer he's in office, the more uncertain he is about each vote.

That's one of the two or three most accurate statements I've ever heard about the Legislature.

It used to drive me nuts how lawmakers could botch perfectly obvious votes. They'd get distracted by what, to me, were irrelevant or unlikely scenarios. They'd find boogeymen behind the most innocent of proposals and use that as an excuse to vote no.

But, like Erpelding, the longer I'm here the more boogeymen I see.

The nature of the Legislature is such that the issues are often complex and the answers rarely easy. Even "obvious" votes come at a cost to someone's interests. Seemingly simple bills can end up in car wrecks as opponents and unintended consequences arise out of nowhere.

Erpelding's remark highlights the fact that, as lawmakers gain experience with the dangers inherent to their office, they inevitably grow cautious. They learn to doubt, learn to ask better questions.

What he wasn't saying, though, was play it safe. He wasn't recommending that lawmakers just stay home and avoid the risk.

Yet that, unfortunately, seems to be the intent of House Republicans this session. They're as willing as ever to contradict Democrats and oppose federal practices, but when it comes to intra-party feuds their appetite has greatly diminished - at least publicly.

Whatever fights they're having on transportation funding, teacher pay and tax policy are taking place largely behind closed doors. They want to "work things out," come to an agreement on their own, before presenting a fait accompli to the entire body.

They'll never win the girl that way. Scars need to be seen to be admired.

Speaking at a recent Lincoln Day banquet, former Gov. Phil Batt said fiscal responsibility was one of his major concerns during his time in office, but he doesn't see it as his legacy.

"And the public doesn't either," he said. "They'd rather talk about my uphill, successful effort to cover farm laborers with workers' compensation, or my contract with the federal government to keep nuclear waste from being stored over the Snake River Aquifer."

What the 88-year-old statesman was doing was showing off his scars.

Whether Idahoans actually remember him for those debates or not, they're the battles he remembers. They're the touchstones he looks back on with pride.

That's something today's lawmakers may want to keep in mind.

There are perfectly good and intelligent reasons for Republicans to avoid another intra-party fight. There are perfectly good and intelligent reasons to work things out behind closed doors. But years from now, no one will remember those reasons - including the lawmakers themselves.

What they'll remember is the look in the girl's eye when they handed back her puppy. They'll remember the epic brawl with that awesome bear. They'll look at their scars and take pride in a job well-done.