“WARNING: entering this cubicle may be hazardous to your health. Side effects may include; headache, nausea, heartburn, panic attacks, and occasional bouts of depression.”

Commercial warning labels went through my head as I made my way to my co-workers 6x6 cubicle. To say Joan’s work area is small would be an understatement, and could be better described as a coat closet with a sitting area. I do not believe it is possible to fill this space with any more than what currently exists.

As I look at the stacks of paper files that litter her desk like waste on the side of the highway, and her graveyard of drinking cups and water bottles, I am filled with apprehension. Did I choose the right person to observe? Will I still enjoy the idea of being an Internal Auditor when I leave today? Didn’t I see that same dust bunny behind her computer monitor two weeks
ago? The battle between my “good shoulder angel” and “bad shoulder angel” raged on as I turned to see Joan make her way off the elevator, and towards her desk.

Joan, a mature adult in her middle fifties, is a “clip out version” of a Pisces. She is mellow about conflict, yet energetic when necessary. She has a passion for auditing, and a tendency to be sensitive about her flaws. I relate to Joan on a professional level because we share the same excitement for Internal Auditing. I think it is why I decided to observe her in my quest; we were cut from the same mold. I will describe for you a typical day for Joan, an Internal Auditor for a Federal Credit Union. On the surface these events may appear ordinary; however, to witness them first-hand brings new meaning to the term “multi-tasking”.

Joan’s morning begins by powering up her computer, and casually walking over to the coffee-pot for her morning “fill-up”. Hot steam drifts across her face like, a finger slowly beckoning you to its owner. The aroma is intoxicating, and overwhelms the senses with an impression of a day filled with peace and harmony. In a trance, she returns to her desk to begin her morning routine of daily reports. As I witness this ritual with a sense of awe, I am reminded of a story from my childhood, “Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing”, and how things are seldom as they seem. Watching Joan burrow through her morning tasks convinces me, the daily routine of an Internal Auditor is anything but “routine”.

As Joan sits down at her corner desk, she begins her review of twenty-five emails from the previous day. Within minutes she is interrupted by a phone call from Khoa, her boss. He is running late, but needs a status report of current projects on his desk by 10:00 am. This may sound like a small task; however, when you consider Internal Audit is responsible for reviewing all areas within a multi-billion dollar organization, projects can add up.
After completion of her ‘priority one’ project, Joan opens up the first of five daily reports. These reports will need to be completed with memorandums prepared before the end-of-day. While digging into corporate credit card expenses, Joan decides checks-and-balances can be placed on hold for a short bathroom break. Joan returns a few minutes later to an urgent phone message. A team member needs assistance on a difficult account. Considering the conversation lasted twenty-two minutes longer than anticipated, Joan excuses herself to refill her coffee cup.

Different from the first cup, all sugar and creamer set aside, Joan returns with a new look on her face. Gone is the morning’s look of peace and harmony. It is replaced by the slightly frazzled look of a college student, up all night on a study binge for mid-terms. Work resumes as she reviews her second report of the day. Almost to the finish line of this project, Joan is interrupted by a neighbor co-worker; he needs her signature on an employee expense report. Before the last swish of the pen can be made, her phone rings. No words are necessary as the expression on her face speaks volumes; “What now?”

By 10:00 am Joan has made her way through three daily reports, six urgent phone calls, two expense reports, three cups of black coffee, and one Nature Valley, Oat and Honey, granola bar. Not one spare inch of desk space can be seen. The “completed” pile occupies an 8.5” x 11” space while the “pending” pile, which can be described as Mt. Everest waiting to be conquered, takes up the remaining 172 inches. Even to my eyes, an observer, this pile is in vast contrast to what has been completed for the morning. Before Joan can take her first step to the peak, Khoa arrives to call a mandatory staff meeting. Facial expressions change from frazzled to flabbergasted, as tired eyes change to red-rimmed in an instant, and horns are now used to hold up this morning’s halo.
Walking back to her desk, Joan takes the leap back into reports. Fourth report numbers require the removal of shoes under the desk, and eye glasses lie abandoned beside the discarded coffee cup and granola bar wrapper. Coffee is replaced by a more calming mint tea, and the bridge of her nose is massaged. Victory is won over the fifth and final report.

Three phone calls and two staff meetings later, Joan is left alone. Before a sigh is expelled, Khoa appears above the top of her cubicle. Like a serpent, emerging from his den, he drops off a special assignment. It is deemed “priority one”, with a 4:00 pm deadline. As this new development arises, the “white flag” is raised high above her head. Joan surrenders to the challenges of another day in Internal Audit.

While no one was harmed during this observation, several aspirin’s were consumed in the process. Although Internal Auditors have a busy work load, as I was witness to this day, it is still a profession I want to pursue, and I am sure to gain deep satisfaction from. I do not know what new challenges will be presented, but I will meet each one with determination because I know that it is just like a bottle of Heinz ketchup; “Good things come to those who wait.”