

Bionic Bodies, With Canes



Photo: Mo Riza, via flickr

BY MARCIA EPSTEIN

“Darling, I Am Growing Old, Silver Threads Among the Gold.” And fibromyalgia plus spinal arthritis.

Are we having fun yet? But enough about me. Let me tell you about my partner (with his complete agreement). My big, strong, completely healthy-seeming partner has been monitored for a mild heart condition for 20 years. Suddenly, his echocardiogram changed and tests ensued. A cardiac catheterization, and this week an implant of a defibrillator/pacemaker device.

He’s now a bionic man, with a home monitor that sends signals directly to the doctor’s office. He seems

fine — will be fine, I hope — but it’s scary. It’s very scary. The whole hospital experience was difficult, for both of us. I was pretty anxious and until we got him out of there the next day (I told the front desk we’d had a great time but sadly had to leave), I didn’t breathe freely.

We’re both still recovering. So now his heart is kept healthy (we hope) by wires and devices and remote monitoring, plus lots of doctors’ visits to come. This is enough to catapult anyone straight into the joys of old age. I’ve avoided the hospital so far, and hope to keep on doing so. Oh, they were very nice, very thoughtful, but it’s a hospital. My partner, who had no symptoms whatsoever, is taking up his old life starting tomorrow. He will be walking with his group, working part-time, driving to Long Island to see his family. But there are wires in his heart. It’s a head-spinning thought.

More head-spinning thoughts. Questions, really. Why doesn’t Medicare cover dental care? Aren’t teeth part of the body? A person could go broke just with a few dental procedures, not to mention implants, root canals, etc. And did you know that Medicare doesn’t cover safety equipment, such as shower grab bars, even though it spends billions on the treatment resulting from falls in the elderly? What the heck?

A lighter note. I had a lovely Mother’s Day brunch with my entire family. Tribeca might as well be Greece as far as I am concerned. I am such an Upper West Sider that venturing to a new neighborhood is like taking a trip. And I get to go home to my own bed. There are so many neighborhoods to explore in Manhattan, I’m putting that on my to-do list. Then there’s Brooklyn, where I’ve rarely been since my birth sometime in the far, far past.

My friend, who just moved to an assisted living facility near where we were on Sunday is in awe learning about her new neighborhood. She, also an Upper West Sider, is astonished at how different it all is from what she’s used to. My only problem in exploring is my back, which keeps me from taking long hikes. I have therefore joined, from BAiP (Bloomingdale Aging in Place), a walking group for the halt and the lame (my expression). I will begin on Friday, and it’s supposed to be for people like me who have trouble walking long distances, people with canes, maybe even walkers.

Ten blocks max each way, maybe coffee in between. Sounds perfect. I can't wait to begin, both for the easy walking and for meeting new people. I love BAiP, our own neighborhood NORC (Naturally Occuring Retirement Community). I'll let you know how it goes.