

Mid-life crisis

The short distance between being hip and breaking a hip

by Rob Gair

I think I'm having a mid-life crisis—at the ripe age of 43. Up until recently, it was nothing major: a little boredom with my life and a general awareness I'm not as robust as I once was (like sore knees in the morning). But for the most part I was content to let it simmer. Then about a year ago, things started ramping up.

Last spring, I was asked to participate in Dr. Julio Montaner's osteoporosis study. The researchers explained that thinning of the bones is relatively common in HIV-positive men and they wanted to do some tests to see if they could find commonalities. First, a bone density test determined that I did in fact have osteoporosis. "This can't be," I thought, "osteoporosis is for grannies."

I tried taking extra calcium over the next few months to help build up my bones, but I had to stop because it interacted with my tenofovir. For a while, I tried to put the whole diagnosis in the back of my mind. Then I experienced a quintessential geriatric event: I broke my hip.

It was a sunny late August morning and I was in good spirits as I started out on my bicycle. The plan was to run some errands then go to work late in the afternoon. About midday, I came upon a traffic calming area where city workers were doing some gardening. I decided to cycle through without getting off my bike. Big mistake. The sidewalk was wet from the landscaping and when I turned the front wheel of my bike to the right, the back tire began slipping to the left. Instinctively I put my right foot on the ground to break the fall but the bike kept

slipping and, with my left leg straddled over it, I did the splits. Then snap!—and I was on the ground.

When the paramedics arrived, one of them asked me if I wanted laughing gas to ease the pain. "It works great for hip fractures in old ladies," he said. I thought it was an inappropriate comparison, but I was in too much pain to be proud so I sucked it back before we headed to the hospital.



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Once I got to St. Paul's Hospital, things happened with amazing efficiency. To get me onto the x-ray table, I was placed in a harness like the ones they use to get nursing home residents into the bathtub. Soon after the doctor came by to tell me that—surprise—I had broken my hip and I needed urgent surgery to repair it because the fracture was disrupting the blood supply to my hip socket.

The next morning I found myself in the hospital flat on my back. An elderly lady was in the bed across from me with a bleeding nose (apparently no beds in the bleeding nose ward). My right leg felt like a lead pipe, it ached constantly, and I had to literally hoist it with both hands to move it anywhere.

When the surgeon dropped by, she told me I had two screws in my hip and that I wouldn't be able to weight-bear on my injured leg for at least six weeks. This posed a major problem because I live alone on the top floor of a three-story walk-up. After a couple of quick lessons from the physiotherapist on how to navigate stairs with only one leg, I was discharged along with a "good luck" and a list of equipment that I needed to borrow from the Red Cross: an elevated toilet seat, a

bench for the bathtub, a walker, and a wheelchair. The final blow came when I was told that I didn't qualify for home assistance because I was "too young." At the time, I was too shell-shocked to fully appreciate the irony of this.

The next six weeks were a flood of ups and down. Ultimately, I managed to get through the ordeal, but not without the help of a few people—most notably my friends Steve, John, Lynn, and other friends and co-workers. And thank God for television and Sudoku puzzles.

As for the mid-life crisis: it's now on a rolling boil, but at least I'm here and I'm more or less in one piece. And that's a good thing. ☺

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