



Wandering & Wondering

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THE ACCIDENT

I wouldn't wish a torn quadriceps tendon on my worst enemy. It is a scary and painful injury with a long, uncomfortable recovery. Bill Clinton survived his, so he is my role model. On November 1, I was at the Saguaro Inn in Palm Springs to attend my nephew's wedding. On my way downstairs in the morning to find coffee, I stumbled on the carpeted stairs and heard or felt an ominous pop in my right knee. I crumbled to the (luckily) carpeted landing, dragged myself out the door into the hallway, and called for help. Hotel maids, maintenance men, and a front-desk clerk raced to my aid. They got me into a wheelchair and back to my room. I couldn't raise my badly swollen right leg, so I was driven to a Kaiser-affiliated urgent-care facility nearby. X-rays were negative, but the doctor said to see an orthopedist as soon as possible. I bought a cane and a knee immobilizer for the trip home. My wonderful traveling companion had to drive, of course, and she has been at my side ever since the accident, helping me in every way. On November 13, I underwent successful surgery. I am still in awe of the surgeon and nurses at Kaiser South San Francisco. I was totally freaked out as my 1 p.m. surgery appointment stretched into 5 p.m. due to an inpatient emergency. But once I went into the operating room, everything was stress-free and pain-free. I never felt the spinal block or the surgery, just a little tugging sensation as they sewed up my knee. I was awake the whole

time; only a towel prevented me from watching the operation (which I would have done if they had let me – don't ask, it's a journalistic thing). Next thing I knew, my surgeon announced, "Thirty-three minutes, no complications." I told him and his OR staff that they were my heroes. Then I was wheeled into recovery and finally a private room, where I spent 24 hours absorbing saline solution laced with painkillers and antibiotics. I was fascinated with the purple and blue globs of chemicals trailing down my IV line into the back of my hand. When the spinal block wore off a few hours later, I felt a wave of pain from the surgery, but the expert nursing staff pumped me so full of Percocet, Advil, Dilaudid, Toradol, and God knows what else that, except for a few minutes of excruciating pain in my operated knee, I drifted along in a drug-addled state of bliss. The entire Kaiser staff, including my new inpatient and in-home physical therapists, are top-notch caregivers and also delightful people to talk to, especially when you are flat on your back and have no means of escape. So now begins the long six months of wearing a splint and a cast, rebuilding strength in the knee, and not being able to swim or bike until 2015. Stir crazy much? Realization: It could have been a lot worse.

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