**Bringing In The New Year -- 2012**

**by**

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2011 was a very tough year for me from beginning to end.

All is looking up now however – just in time for the New Year.

2011 brought approximately 7 rehab and nursing home admissions for me to deal with for various reasons including severe pancreatitis and ultimately gall bladder removal at MGH after my pancreas stopped being inflamed.

They generally only allow you to eat ice chips in that situation for quite a while.

I tripped and broke a toe causing my entire leg to become infected within several days as well requiring hospitalization for IV antibiotics.

I had two overnight admissions to a hospital for elevated potassium levels this year related to my stage 5 CKD followed by weeks in rehabs.

I had two overnight admissions due to severe swelling of my legs related to stage 5 CKD and once again followed by long rehab stays with strong pain medications administered as usual.

I had four car accidents between rehabs and nursing homes – only one minor fender-bender in a parking lot was my fault as I backed out of a parking space.

A medical doctor attempted to break my leg with all of his force since he the person that he was working for evidently felt that I might claim personal injury caused by one of these accidents.

I believe it was all at the bequest of one of the top administrators of the hospital.

Each rehab and nursing home administered morphine, oxycodone and/or dilaudid every four hours twenty four hours per day to me.

This went on for just about the entire ten months.

They caused a constant state of lethargy and confusion for me.

I never thought that I would recover.

It almost seemed like an ongoing endless conspiracy to suppress me and my art and ideas. I was never quite sure who could be behind it all.

I had my strong suspicions however as to the guilty parties involved in my treatment – even suspecting those closest to me at times.

During all of this - my best friend stuck with me and got me through however.

I have always said that if you have one good friend that is all you need.

He visited me just about every day in these facilities for all of those months.

I always looked forward to his visits greatly.

He even visited just about every day fifty miles away at MGH when I was frequently a patient there for various reasons.

I am an artist and he is a photographer.

We have creativity in common.

He is a great guy and he says I am as well.

It seems at times that many people do not agree.

He was nice enough to deliver artwork of mine to several major annual exhibits in Central MA while I was a patient in these facilities.

His entering my paintings into these exhibits resulted in my being awarded two ribbons at two of the exhibits and a piece of artwork being selected for another judged exhibit at the Fitchburg Art Museum.

I was able to attend those exhibits with the assistance of this friend as well while I had been discharged from these facilities for short periods of time coincidentally.

These facilities do not generally allow patients to get out of bed even -- for fear of a patient falling and hurting themselves making the facility liable for those injuries. Patients are allowed to leave the room and exercise in the gym with possibly one hour of physical therapy a day with the assistance of the physical therapist only.

Because of this fact -- my muscles basically had atrophied through the months making me think I would never recover no matter what efforts I made.

It became extremely difficult to just sit up in bed even or in a chair to eat meals for instance.

Physical therapy although professionally executed at the last facility was something I had to take baby steps with each time I was in the gym for physical therapy.

I remember it as being very difficult.

I made valiant efforts however to make progress.

I was mistaken that I would never recover. I feel great generally now. I have even been back to the gym twice in recent weeks.

I was in a wheel chair for extended periods during these rehab admissions.

At my last rehab which provided very good physical therapy – I was able to graduate to a walker and at the end finally to a cane.

Now just six weeks later I generally do not even use the cane any longer.

I think my friend is impressed with the progress he has witnessed.

I have been withdrawn from these drugs for about three months now thankfully.

Often the facilities discharged me taking home large samples of these drugs quite mistakenly causing me to have frequent falls and hitting my head and my taking too many pills accidentally caused by the confusion of the painkillers.

I ended up in the ER many times resulting in many MRI Brain Scans and X-Rays and immediate readmissions to yet further facilities.

I had already found and rented the perfect studio apartment while a patient in that last facility.

I really wanted the apartment.

I got it and the owner completely renovated it to prepare for my arrival including all new appliances, carpeting, linoleum and chandelier in the dining room.

My friend and his wife with my instructions from that last facility over the period of several months completely cleared out my six room house – donating much of the items to The Salvation Army at my instruction from what I recalled being in the house since everything would not have fit in the studio apartment which I hoped to move into soon.

I rented a huge dumpster by phone from the rehab facility which was dropped off to be picked up a week later. My friend & his wife were able to completely fill it to the brim with trash from my two attics and the basement.

He and his wife renovated my home quite a bit here and there as well to prepare it to put it on the market for sale ASAP.

The house had become too expensive to maintain and too large for one person.

For a year I was not even able to go up to the second floor due to weakness where my art studio was during my occasional stays there between hospitalizations.

Considering heating costs, yard work, snowplowing, electricity, water, taxes, etc. – I really needed to downsize.

I moved to my new beautiful studio apartment and kept just enough belongings to fill it nicely mostly my best artwork, nice items my mother had purchased through the years & my beautiful new bedroom set. I kept just a small box or two of family memorabilia.

It looks beautiful since I kept the best items.

All utilities are included with the reasonably priced monthly rent at my new studio apartment.

A garage space is provided with no extra charge as well underneath the building.

The residents here have been very nice – introducing themselves and chatting.

There is a small beautiful community room on each floor in which the residents play cards nightly and have birthday and holiday parties.

They gather in a large community room in the basement to play Bingo every Tuesday evening.

I plan to join in tomorrow night for the first time.

(I still have not one year later but I still would like to.

I am very pleased with my new apartment and hope to stay here for a very long time.

I put my house on the market just as I moved to my new apartment and it seems that the closing should be very soon – possibly even this week - after only being on the market for three weeks.

I am very lucky everyone tells me with that definitely.

I feared selling the house could potentially take a very long time.

I have a great real estate broker however.

It was a bittersweet, difficult decision to sell the house since I was basically born and raised there.

Now it is very clear that it was the absolute right decision. Everything has worked out perfectly.

I love my new apartment.

I never dreamed that I could have such a nice apartment.

I began dialysis about six weeks ago.

I am required to take the MART bus three times a week back and forth to dialysis. The MART bus requires that one wait on the street at pick-up time. That worried me since it would mean that in the winter I would have to get a path shoveled somehow to the street and wait out in the cold. That would be especially bad possibly since I can potentially have a lowered immune system at this point. One never knows how much snow we could have.

Dialysis patients simply cannot miss a treatment whatsoever.

At my new apartment building I can wait on a bench inside the lobby for the MART bus three times a week.

Dialysis has not been a walk in the park however but I am trying my best to stay positive about it.

I do not really have a choice.

I had a fistula operation on my left wrist performed at Leominster Hospital over a year ago for the purpose of having dialysis through that method.

It never matured.

About six weeks ago (while I was in that good rehab) doctors informed me that it was definitely time to begin dialysis according to blood test results and the fact that I had become anemic which required yet another hospital admission for blood transfusions,

I had to have a chest catheter or chest port inserted with tubes to provide dialysis at that point.

That first one was done at Leominster Hospital.

In the past six weeks since beginning dialysis I have had to have two chest catheter replacements because they have become blocked.

Three weeks ago I went to my surgeon who removed my gall bladder at MGH last summer and he performed a fistula operation on my upper left arm after extensive x-rays and ultra- sounds to locate good veins.

During that week my entire left arm became infected, swollen, red and painful.

I was rushed back to MGH by ambulance for treatments of high doses of antibiotics every twelve hours for my three day admission there.

While a patient there I required my regular dialysis treatment.

They provided that treatment at MGH in their very nice dialysis treatment center.

Unfortunately my catheter failed that day after having it for only one week.

I had to have a catheter replacement operation right away again.

It is actually painless.

I hate to say it but I am almost used to it.

They generally do not use anesthesia or even sedatives – simply local anesthesia or topical almost.

There are no nerve endings within the body.

I had a reaction to the very high doses of Tylenol and ibuprofen which were prescribed at discharge and had to return to MGH to see a transplant surgeon again.

I have been accepted for the kidney donation list at MGH. That process took approximately 1½ years to complete and become accepted.

Generally I see specialist doctors in the transplant department as an outpatient and even as an inpatient since they have a special unit just for transplant patients.

I had to return to MGH for a surgeon’s advice. He looked at the infection and felt it was definitely quite infected again however he said it could be much worse such as requiring drainage of fluid.

He advised that it would be fine as well as advising discontinuing the two pain killer medications (Tylenol and Ibuprofen) altogether since they could hinder the healing process.

He assured me that it would be painful without the Tylenol and Ibuprofen but better for the healing process.

He said that the operation was a huge success by listening to the strong “Buzz” or pulse necessary for dialysis.

It is improving greatly at this point and the nurses and doctors at my dialysis center check it every time I am there and redress it.

Hopefully it works in two or three months and I will be able to have my chest port removed and able to take showers again for one thing.

Arm fistulas are much less prone to infection most importantly which is a constant concern of mine with the chest port.

I just found out today that a lot of patients receiving dialysis through an arm fistula have their doctor prescribe a strong numbing cream which is applied before arriving for dialysis and wrapped and taped by the patient themselves at home.

It evidently helps greatly with the pain of being stuck by a needle every other day.

I am glad that it seems that the rough part of this fistula operation and resulting infections are over now seemingly.

It feels okay now finally.

I don’t really worry about it too much any longer this week.

I return to MGH next week to have the actual surgeon who performed the operation examine it.

I am able to relax now and be more peaceful finally in my life and in new apartment and with life in general after so much hullabaloo.

I have had a hobby of collecting dollhouse dolls, furniture and accessories for approximately thirty years.

My late father made the dollhouse for me about thirty years ago.

I have been very grateful to him for that.

It looks as good as the day he finished it.

The mother of a friend of mine at the time thirty years ago or so was a professional doll maker.

She made them from top to bottom in all sizes and styles.

She made the molds for the porcelain heads, faces and hands and feet.

She applied the hair and painted the features on the faces.

She made all of the clothes and hats and other accessories such as purses.

She was generous enough to make several of them for me in perfect proportion to my dollhouse which is generally a standard dollhouse proportion of1inch to 12 inches.

I still have those dolls of course after quite a few moves which I have made over the course of thirty years.

I have always made sure that my dollhouse and items were packed carefully.

I have items of all sorts in my dollhouse.

Many are very unique items which I searched for all over Boston years ago and now on the internet.

It is beautiful and gives me great relaxing enjoyment admiring it and rearranging it and finding the perfect spot for new items purchased.

As a treat to myself for Christmas this year and because of all that I have been through this year I purchased my second dollhouse online.

It is in the style of a Vermont Farmhouse from the 1880’s. I have already begun the process of filling it with items and dolls.

For this dollhouse I have chosen to fill the house with actual antique dollhouse dolls, furniture and accessories as much as possible.

It is clear already what a difference these authentic antique items make in the appearance of a dollhouse.

It already is quite stunning with the obviously antique items many of which date to the mid -1800’s.

I have come to truly enjoy my new apartment and my two dollhouses.

My best friend of course helps me out with many things. We see each other just about daily.

He is nice enough to somewhat watch over me.

Since I started dialysis six weeks ago or so I have returned to creating artwork for the first time in about ten months after a lifetime of being creative and regularly exhibiting, etc. It has been quite a long break from something that has always been so important to me and gotten me through things in the past.

I am glad that is over as well and that I am able to be creative once again and display my artwork already.

I have rejoined the art gallery which I belonged to for several years.

I have already created quite a few new pieces for my display space.

I am using a new medium which I somewhat came up with myself.

I am creating colored tissue paper collages on hand-made pressed watercolor paper which have rough tattered edges which create a very nice professional and almost museum quality effect.

I use a variety of subject matters for the works.

I apply the tissue paper with brushes and paste which I make combining water and powder which is meant specifically for gluing paper.

They are lots of fun for me to create and frame and display at the gallery.

They are easy enough for me to create at this point and enjoyable to work on but at the same time I have been very pleased with the final result and appearance of the works enough to frame them and display them in the gallery.

It keeps me out of trouble as I have always said about my artwork.

I am much stronger now with the assistance of many people and just happenstance good luck here and there. Luck of the Irish I suppose.

With all of it’s’ problems so far -- dialysis I must admit seems to have made me feel much better in general physically and mentally and/or psychologically.

I generally cook my own meals now which can make anybody feel better as well.

I must work on restricting my fluid intake much more although since when I do not I get severe cramps during dialysis in my legs and hands and the pain can last for days from them afterwards. I had returned to using sea salt on some food recently after years of not using salt. It is the worst thing for kidney disease patients obviously.

I began to get swollen all over quickly yesterday especially because of using a lot this weekend.

I gave the sea salt grinder bottle to my friend tonight much like when I quit drinking cold turkey thirty years ago and smoking cold turkey as well about eighteen years ago.

I was very uplifted and encouraged today however in the waiting room before dialysis started.

The nurse switched me from having dialysis on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays to Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays as of this week.

Today was my first new day with this schedule.

All of the patients are brand new to me.

My previous group chatted in the waiting room before dialysis about such things as food and recipes and on the MART bus as well while riding. Many of the patients watch the Food Channel while in dialysis such as I do each time I am there for a treatment.

Everyone has a personal TV at their chair.

I was chatting with a man sitting next to me waiting to enter the dialysis center when called whom I had never met before.

I asked him about his family and where he was from, etc. – just to make conversation.

Then I asked him how long he has been receiving dialysis treatments.

He looked right at me with a pause and somewhat of a smile and said “Eighteen years –right here at this dialysis center”.

I was so encouraged to hear that especially after my bumps in the road so quickly already in my treatment which I have tried not to let discourage me.

I told him quickly and earnestly how good that news made me feel.

Along with my return to my artwork I have been having fun adding dozens and dozens of photos of my artwork to my Facebook page.

I am finishing up putting text descriptions under each photo when I have spare time as well.

So – “life goes on” -- in the words of Kurt Vonnegut in the 1970’s.

Somehow with the help of my friend and others and just the luck of the draw – I am in a good place right now in life and I must do my best to make sure that it stays that way.

Keep the faith.

Happy New Year -- 2012!