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Once again, Christmastide is upon us and the time to connect with friends and family has arrived. If you didn't hear from us last year, it was because I spent most of December either in hospital or recovering from my last surgery in 2012, an arterial bypass in my left leg which I knew needing doing, but which turned into an emergency on 15th December. I still thank God that my surgeon was on call when I arrived in the emergency department in excruciating pain that evening. The only celebration of Christmas last year was Christmas dinner with the family. For the first time since 1979, I was unable to play the organ for the Christmas morning service but I hope to do so this year.

It was also around Christmas last year when Mary suffered a compression fracture in her spine, caused by nothing more energetic than turning over in bed. This in turn caused swelling in her spinal cord and affected the nerves to her right leg, and shortly after New Year, she was unable even to stand. Being confined to her bedroom, I was doing a lot of up-and-down stairs – until my surgeon said that I needed two weeks of complete bed rest if my surgical incision was ever going to heal properly. Eventually around 7th January, Mary was admitted to hospital and I was able to follow the doctor's orders.

What followed was weeks of tests to find out why Mary had such a problem. At one point, they were even talking of cancer of the spine, but we didn't believe that, correctly as it turned out. The final consensus was that her spine had been damaged by some nine months of being on high doses of prednisone back in 2009 for a different problem. After some nine weeks in Southlake hospital, she moved to Newmarket Health Centre for three months of rehab. With regular physiotherapy, by the time she had to be discharged from NHC, she was able to move around over short distances with a walker (Zimmer frame).

It was obvious by April that we needed to move from our town house with all its stairs and I started looking for either an apartment or bungalow which we could rent. In both Newmarket and Aurora, there was almost nothing suitable and time was running out. In early May, a friend of ours from the church (in Real Estate) found an apartment in Aurora that was available and it seemed to me to be as suitable as anything else, so I immediately signed a lease starting 1st June. There followed a very tiring matter of down-sizing, especially with a lot of stuff that moved with us in 2011 and was "stored" in the basement. With help from the family, we managed to whittle it down to about 20 cartons and nearly two tons of "junk" either went into a bin, or to one of the charities which collects household items. With help from two of Mary's book-group friends, our belongings were packed and ready to go for a moving date of 5th June. The move was quite straightforward and the following day, Janet unpacked most of our kitchen/dining room stuff, and set up a bedroom for Mary, prior to her mandatory discharge from NHC on 10th June.

So here we are six months later, and things are definitely better for Mary. We have regular visits by a physiotherapist/pain management lady who sets targets for Mary to achieve. She can now do a certain amount in the kitchen, and is walking (with the walker) for around ten minutes twice a day. At this time of year, it's mostly up and down the corridors in the building, but it was nice to get outside during our warmish late summer and autumn. She also goes to her hairdresser in Newmarket once a week, but is not doing too much else away from home yet other than doctor/dentist appointments. As for apartment living after some 43 years in a house, we are finding it quite pleasant,

even if we do look out over Yonge Street, which is a major thoroughfare in Ontario. The building is some five years old (we watched it being built), and it is kept scrupulously clean and tidy. Our kitchen is large with loads of cupboards, and we really appreciate having en-suite laundry.

Also, we are just a 2-minute drive from Dave, Nicole and Owen and the church is about a five-minute drive. I dropped out of nearly everything at the church, apart from maintaining their website for most of this year, but have started back in the choir a couple of months ago. I don't think Mary will ever get back to choir, at least as long as she needs a walker. Also, we have dropped both York Symphony and Theatre Aurora this year.

It really looks as though we would not be able to handle the cottage in New Brunswick, so it's a good thing we planned on selling it a couple of years ago. That deal was finally completed this past July, with Harry & Nicola Collins buying the place – they have kept an eye on the cottage for many years now and are well placed to make use of it, since they live at the top of the lane to the cottage. Maybe we'll be able to visit sometime, but at the moment, it doesn't look too probable.



We are enjoying the grandchildren, although we don't see them that often. Dave continues to work from home, and last June, Nicole went back to work after a lengthy maternity/vacation leave. So Owen is now in daycare through the week and seems to like it. He is so cheerful all the time; don't think this could have come from either myself or Dave! Janet continues at Sony in Toronto and the commute from Oshawa doesn't get any easier. Grace has just turned seven and Emily is inching up towards four. Both of them are now in Highland Dance and Grace has competed in several competitive events with some success. The family even went to Montreal for the National Championships back in July. No medals there, but good for experience.



Photo (left) – Grace & Emily in Montreal (July 2013) Photo (right) – Owen at Butterfly Conservatory (November 2013)

Wishing you a very Merry Christmas and all the best for 2014. We hope and pray for a better 2014 than the past year.

Richard & Mary

P.S. If you are interested, there are some pictures of our apartment building at <http://richib.com/victorian.html>