

From the other side of the fence (2) – *Convalescence*

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Home now for past six weeks – sometimes the time seems to have gone quickly, at other times definitely not. The first week was dominated by maintaining an adequate fluid balance; accurately measuring fluid input, urine output and recording it all on a personally designed chart (reprints can be ordered free of charge by Email!).

Initially everything was tiring and a struggle: coughing, swallowing, eating, bathing, hair washing, shaving, sleeping almost upright with many pillows, walking and even using the computer. I felt rather vulnerable and did not like being in the house on my own. The first weekend was particularly difficult as I developed a wound infection which finally manifested itself by pouring anaerobic smelly pus all over the bedclothes at 3am on the Sunday morning. This responded to a week's course of appropriate antibiotics very kindly started by a good GP friend on a non professional visit.

Now I am stronger, my neck is more mobile, although still baggy on the left and I can walk for over an hour round the local park. Tried a short jog yesterday but could only do about 400 yards without walking, legs fine but cardiovascular system definitely in need of plenty of training before the Windsor Half Marathon at the end of September

Becoming accustomed to a 'lazy' start to the day. At about 8am I connect my laptop to the Internet in bed via a wireless hub set up by son Duncan. Wife Fiona then brings me cooked breakfast in bed as she says I need fattening up for radiotherapy! For the first week of February, Fiona and a friend went on a week's residential Christian counselling course at Waverly

Abbey near Farnham – good for her to escape from the toil of caring so well for me – I was looked after by first of all my mum from Scotland and then my mother in law from Kent, both very fit 79-year-olds!

Now my concentration span is increasing I can cope with a lot more Emails and more Mercy Ships issues. For light entertainment I am reading the NO.1 ladies detective agency series by Alexander McCall Smith. On a more serious note, I'm really enjoying 'Finishing Well' by American author Bob Buford. It is about a series of interviews with various gifted individuals who have had a life change in middle age from life 1, which is chasing 'success', (measured by money, achievement and power) to life 2 which is concerned with legacy and significance often for no remuneration and funded by finances obtained in 'life 1'. Retirement is definitely not on the agenda of any of the individuals portrayed in the book. Quote: *'A retired person is just living for her or himself, spending their remaining years satisfying their personal whims and desires – I cannot imagine not having a purpose beyond just living out my remaining years in an aimless self indulgent sort of way'*.

A couple of sentences, among many I found worth further consideration, were as follows: *'Lord, I can't do anything about yesterday and tomorrow may not come, let me be your man today.'* And *'Service to others is the rent we pay for the room we have on Earth.'*

A good friend of a similar vintage only a short distance walk away is suffering from myeloma and is awaiting a stem cell transplant in Oxford. He is having terrible bladder problems after being catheterised

recently for over six weeks so I am trying to support and help him and his wife through this difficult time – it seems that finding a good Pilates instructor to provide appropriate exercises to retrain and strengthen the bladder neck may be the solution to the problem according to an anaesthetist and pain specialist friend of mine who has had experience dealing with this problem in post neurosurgical patients. Two days ago she was walking with me to the post office, a route which just happened to pass my friend's front door – so we had to go and pay a visit! Her simple and caring but realistic explanation for his continued discomfort already seem to have made a difference.

In the evenings, Fiona and I have been watching TV and also enjoyed some DVDs including: 'The day after tomorrow' (very much more plausible post tsunami), 'The last Samurai', 'Master and Commander' and 'Fahrenheit 9/11'.

Funnily enough the nights are the hardest time, I'm not sleeping very well and often wake up anxious about possible complications of impending radiotherapy, the start date of which is still not fixed – I need to get it over and done with so I can get on with my life. I am probably going to miss the third ski trip of the season but *c'est la vie*, one must prioritise in life.

In would like to thank all my friends (I never realised I had so many) for the tremendous support and prayers our family have had and continue to have from all over the World. Emails, cards, letters, phone calls and even several bunches of flowers. Also we gratefully appreciate all the visitors we have had who have really done much to encourage and keep my spirits up.