MUSINGS OF AN AGEING WOMAN (Part 1)

A few nights ago, as I was preparing for bed, I realized that a staple of my nightly routine was the application of a knee brace (preferably with ice) and two wrist braces. In fact, I now needed an exoskeleton to be able to function. Thank goodness I have neither husband nor boyfriend for sleeping with me would be like sleeping with a lobster (with far less reward)!

That got me to thinking about my current state as I approach three score and ten! Gone was the smooth faced, even-complexioned, clear-eyed, shapely and fairly attractive woman with a massive head of jet-black hair who had had a car load of men follow her to the beach because they had seen her pull into a gas station and fill her car, clad in a short pants suit (I was going to the beach after all, and these were no pom-pom shorts!). Instead, the mirror presented me with a completely different picture. The head of hair had migrated south to my chin, leaving behind a few wisps to give the effect of a billiard ball that had rolled across a gray carpet and collected some hairs on its journey. The smooth face now has a few wrinkles, not many but that’s the good news so far. But the even complexion is gone, thanks to the migrating hairs and the dark spots resulting from psoriasis and age. The clear eyes have budding cataracts and are masked behind increasingly thicker progressive lensed spectacles. And as for those legs, they are rippled with cellulite. Indeed, there is still a shape, but it is not quite the one of yore. There is more on top, in front, at the side, in fact, there is more everywhere.

So much for the outside, but the innards are not much better. The crickets that I used to hear at night only, now sing non-stop in my head. But I can still hear the birds in the morning. And I can see the sky, the trees, the mountains and the sea though I dare not try to read anything without those progressive lenses. So because my memory is also not what it used to be, I have Dollar Store readers stationed in every place I am likely to be in need, one pair in every handbag, one pair at each of my children’s home, even a pair in the organ bench at church. Speaking of memories, before I forget, how many times have you thought of something to say and by the time there is a break in the conversation that would allow your intervention, you have forgotten what it is you were going to say? Or you just had something in your hand and ten seconds later, you can’t find it? Days later you find it, right where you had been because obviously it was staring at you all the time. Or the children claim that they’ve told you something, of which you have no memory. That one I will not claim. I have learnt that it is usually not me, it is them. They planned to tell me and didn’t or told someone else and assumed that I heard. Occasionally, I have had my revenge, like when one child could not find her phone – it was in the refrigerator (and no, I did not put it there).

The mobility is not what it used to be either. I love the sea. Getting in is easy but no one told me that getting out could become challenging. As soon as I regain my balance, the slightest motion of the water would knock me off my feet again. I partially solved that problem by rolling at the water’s edge until I got past the water. I thought that I alone suffered this fate until my “nephew” accompanied me on a visit to the beach in Barbados and as I tried to get out, he says, “Auntie Yvette, why do you and Mummy roll around in the water when you’re coming out”? [He is a very dear boy, so I will forgive him]. But then there is the problem of getting to my feet when I get on land. Normally, I go from a sitting position to standing with a jump start, i.e., I surreptitiously press down on the armrests of the chair and shoot upright. Obviously then, I only sit on high stools, chairs with armrests or chairs around a very sturdy table (I have toppled a table that had never been tested as a propelling mechanism for the elderly). Invitations to sit when visiting usually elicit a response of “I’m OK. I don’t mind standing”. COVID has put paid to that embarrassment.

Stairs present another challenge, worse than any obstacle course, whether going up or down. Ascension can only be done one step at a time, with both feet on the same step before moving onto the next step. And there is a pre-test for the next step. Should it be the right leg with the bad knee that should take the initial weight? Or should it be the left limb with the atherosclerotic hip that should go first? My baby granddaughter offered the optimal solution – go up on all fours. It is fast, safe and efficient – there is no risk of falling. Unfortunately, that does not work for descending. That’s done with a prayer and holding very tightly to the railing for dear life, because from the top stair, looking down 8 steps is like looking at the foot of Mt. Everest from the peak.

And now, to the final indignity – awaking at least once every night to go to the bathroom. While most of my body is at rest, my kidneys work overtime when I am asleep. I have tried everything – go to bed later, no liquids after 10 p.m., after 9 p.m., after 8 p.m. Yet still at 3 a.m., I am awakened. I resolved that problem too. My bathroom is in my bedroom!

But I am not complaining because I am still alive, although I wish that I had been forewarned. I don’t recall my Mom, or even my grandmother who passed in her 90’s and worked her farm until well into her 80’s, having these issues. With life, there is hope. I have and still am finding ways around these “joys of advancing youth”. My home is one-storied with no more than two steps anywhere, lots of railings and things to hold onto, few walls to bump or fall into (banged my head into one child’s wall), no sharp edges, no carpet to trip and fall, few overhead cupboards and these hold only soft things like spare pillows and linen (I was attacked by a falling rice-cooker from another child’s kitchen cupboard), nearly all storage is in drawers, closets go down to the ground so no bending to sweep or retrieve stuff although I do have a nice long-handled device that is very useful. And best of all, did I mention that my bathroom is in my bedroom? The shower stall is drive-in (should I become wheelchair-bound), with a seat so I could rest when tired. And the tub is in the ground so I don’t have to step over any tub edges. Yes, life is very good indeed. For now, I just walk in the sand and look at the sea. It’s very therapeutic.