

# Musings of an Ageing Woman

## (Part 3)

---

*By Yvette Holder*



The ageing process with respect to mobility was longer, slower, and far more subtle and sinister than I expected it to be. The signs were there and though they were small and slight, they surely added up! As I reflect, I think the first hint would have been the panty hose. In those days, (I would have been in my 30's), the well-dressed female wore stockings to work. And so I did. But after a while, the left stocking leg would be twisted, and I would have the dickens of a time to get my heel into the stocking heel and smooth the leg and thigh. As a right-hander, I would put the right leg in first, so I thought that changing the order would fix that problem. It helped, for a while, but then it became too much trouble. So eventually I stopped wearing pantyhose. It was an expense anyway.

Then it was church, where genuflecting is a ritual, performed by old and young alike, upon entry and exit from the church. I could go down, but I used the side of the pew to give a little boost on the way up. After a while, that was not enough and a little hand (only a little!) from the children did what was necessary. But there came a point when the hand was not enough, and I resorted to a respectful bow. But seeing elderly priests bob up and down during the Consecration did nothing for my ego. I thought that it was lack of exercise on my part, especially when the fellow choristers on my bench would groan in unison as they tried to arise from a kneeling to a standing position, with an intermediary semi-sitting position on the pew. Being the youngest in the group, I was determined that this would not be my fate, so my swimming became more earnest, not just for fun (more about that anon).

The next hint came from the pedicures. After a sublime experience in Managua, I was constantly disappointed in subsequent pedicures, until I decided to do my feet myself for, although I could not match my Nicaraguan tutor aesthetician, I was certainly an improvement on any other nail technicians. This satisfactory arrangement was first threatened as I found it increasingly difficult to have a smooth

polish on the nails of the last two toes of the left foot. Then it became a challenge to cut those nails and an even greater one to pumice the outer side of the left sole. I finally conceded defeat and returned to the nail salon. I needed to be pampered anyway, was my consolation.

Of course, there was the Chikungunya bout when I could not get my feet over the edge of the bathtub and had to shower outside of the tub. That's when I built the drive-in shower and the step-in-the ground "bathtub", in the event of dengue, zika, or any other insect-borne virus condition that might affect my joints. I had long since given up on traditional bathtubs for, while I could get into the tub, getting out was a struggle. Even with a hand grip, it was not worth the trouble. Indeed, showering in a bathtub was an extremely nerve-wracking experience every time I did it, for I was in constant dread of falling in the tub. This fear recently became a reality when I really did slip in the tub and in the slow-motion descent, as I tried to find a perch for my hand, I managed to bang my head on the wall, the toilet tank, and the faucet, ending up with multiple swellings on my head, not to mention the sore shoulder, hip, and knees.

And then there was the horse-riding adventure. Someone thought that a horseback ride should be something that I should cross off my bucket list. Now I never had it on MY bucket list – it was put on for me. So, one of the activities for my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday celebratory cross-USA family road trip was a horseback ride on an Arizona trail. We got to the ranch, and I was assigned Doc, a seasoned horse who was actually the guide's personal horse, supposedly very docile, and he was. I had not realized how tall horses are – no wonder they measure them in hands and not feet! Fortunately, the event planner, who shall remain nameless, thoughtfully arranged to have a mounting box for me. I climbed the three steps (back then I could climb steps easily), got to the top, and attempted to throw my right leg over the horse and get into the saddle, as I had seen our guide, a diminutive woman of more than 70 years, do with graceful ease on a horse taller than mine, and without a mounting box! The attempt was a futile one – my right leg could just get to the height of Doc's back, but I could not get it extended to swing it over his back. I felt that I could get that extension with the left leg, which I tried, only to learn that one does not swing a leg over the horse's head. Of course, had I succeeded with the left leg, I would have been facing the horse's rear. But I figured that once up, I could easily swivel to face the correct direction. So, the next attempt was with the left leg, but mounting from the horse's right side, which meant climbing down, moving the mounting box to the other side, and climbing up again. This time, I could not lift the leg even halfway up to the

horse's back, for the left leg had extension, but not height. So back to Doc's left side we (I, the guide's assistant, and the mounting box) returned and the guide and my son-in-law gave me the extra hand to get into the saddle to begin my horseback riding adventure – a tale for another time.

The penultimate clue came from the garden. I love to weed. There is something very therapeutic about weeding, as if one were rooting out some of life's little annoyances, one by one. Usually, I would see one errant plant, bend to pluck it out, and end up clearing a plot. I thought, rather than bend (I had given up squatting a long time ago), I would get one of those cute, foldable garden chairs with pockets at the side for the gardening tools and look quite professional while saving my back. The problem was that with my height, I was still bending to weed and garden. Not only that, but I would have to get up, move the chair, and navigate to a new spot to weed – too much trouble. So, I forwent the gardening chair and opted to just flop onto the earth and weed away. The contact with the earth was invigorating and moving to a new spot to weed simply meant bum-shuffling. The challenge was getting up at the end. Because it was a hillside, I could push off into a standing position or find a sturdy branch to haul myself upright. Eventually, however, this too became problematic, so I got someone to help with the weeding and contented myself with feeding and pruning plants and cutting blooms.

Finally, I noticed that I was tripping a lot, over a loose stone or a jutting tree root, or sometimes just an uneven road surface would be enough to send me sprawling if I could not recover my balance in time. A physiologist/chiropractor friend informed me that as we age, we don't raise our legs enough when we walk. Instead, we tend to shuffle and that is why we trip and fall. That darned left leg again! The remedy, he said, was to walk in sand, preferably wet sand. So now, I had another reason to go to the beach, and it worked. Walking at the beach is good, bathing in the sea is even better, but until I can find a way to exit the water gracefully, I shall restrict myself to walking on the beach.

So that is the current state of affairs. I can't squat but I can bend. I can't run but I can walk, though slowly and stiffly. And I can still smell the roses. **N**

---