

â??Iâ??m too young to need a walker!â?? A fall and fracture jolt an independent life in a comfy Stonestown apartment

Description

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I didnâ??t want a caregiver. My daughter and my sisters were determined to get me one. I had broken my wrist in a fall and couldnâ??t do anything with a sling on my arm. Everyone who stopped by my apartment to see how I was doing had to open a jar or a bottle of Ensure before they left.

Laundry was impossible, especially bed linen and towels. Getting dressed was hard, one-armed. Dishes were not getting done as I couldnâ??t get the sling, and later the hard cast, wet. Showers were worse: I was sticking my hand into a plastic bag and securing it with a scrunchy to keep the cast dry.

So, I did need help with some of the details of daily living. The situation was complicated by my Parkinsonâ??s disease and my weight loss over the past year. My family thought I would forget to eat or exist on Trader Joeâ??s chicken pot pies and mini croissants. To be fair, this was the second bad fall Iâ??d had in four months, and they were afraid I would fall in the bathtub or hit my head on the coffee table.

What would they do all day?

Still, hiring someone to come into my quiet apartment for five hours a day felt like an intrusion. Into what Iâ??m not sure. It isnâ??t like Iâ??m racketeering or anything. What would a caregiver do all day? What would I do all day?

Expressing these thoughts aloud, however, led to overheard whispered conversations that I was â??resistant.â?• Nevertheless, they persisted. My daughter found an agency in the Bay Area and interviewed and hired a caregiver before I knew what happened. She was clearly tired of worrying from Atlanta, where sheâ??d moved with her husband before the pandemic.



Mary Hunt has recovered from her wrist injury, but due to some Parkinsonsâ?? symptoms still pays for a caregiver to help her with cooking and clothes cleaning. Laundry machines are in the basement of her high-rise building. The countertop dishwasher was purchased during her recovery. (Photo by Robin Evans)

Truth be told, the real issue was that I felt embarrassed to need a caregiver. None of my friends had one, unless it was a neighborhood teenager to do laundry or a family member to drop off groceries. My neurologist had suggested a walker. A walker? I was only 76! Far too young to have a walker. Arenâ??t they only for the terminally infirm?

I loftily told my New York sister that a walker didnâ??t conform to my self-image. She quickly snipped back, â??What about a black eye or a broken nose? Do they conform to your self-image?â?• My San Francisco sister seemed determined to swaddle me in bubble wrap and sit me down on the couch for the foreseeable future, a medical alert pendant swinging around my neck.

Iâ??m not the only one

The carapace of my denial was finally breached when I ran into my 94-year-old neighbor in the elevator. â??Of course, everyone hates to give up their independence,â?• she said, as she talked about her decision to donate her car to a charity and take taxis everywhere. I realized I wasnâ??t the only person facing this new change of life. In fact, the U.S. Census Bureau reports, 76.4 million people who are or soon could be in the same position: Thatâ??s the number of people born between 1946 and 1964 â?? the baby boomers. By 2030, all boomers still living will be over 65.

When asked how sheâ??d feel if she could no longer keep up with her lifeâ??s complexities, an 80-year-old friend shot back, â??Defeat.â?• I mulled that over, her answer confirming my sense of being too young to need a helper; I should be able to cook and clean and take care of myself.

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But then I thought: Someone else is doing my laundry. Making lunch and dinner for me three days a week with leftovers for the days she wasnâ??t there. Tidying up my bedroom while Iâ??m having lunch. Ironing! Organizing the linen closet. Folding pillowcases and dish towels. Driving me to appointments, picking up prescriptions at the drugstore.

Truly a blessing

Thus, it dawned: This isnâ??t defeat! Itâ??s a blessing. and Iâ??m lucky to still be compos mentis enough to appreciate it.

Another brick on the road to acceptance has been my realization that I am now prepared for the inevitable decline, at least physically. My shower is decked out with a shower chair, a spray holder and a caddy stuck securely to the wall, filled with smaller bottles of bath gel, shampoo and conditioner.

And last, but not least, my family isnâ??t worrying about me so much.

So, while I hope this period of care ends with my regaining some pounds and enough strength to push open the laundry room door, I know Iâ??ll be ready to accept help when I need it again â?? with grace and gratitude. In the meantime, Iâ??ll take my purple walker up to Trader Joeâ??s and Target and do some errands.

Next in the Series:

Sunday, May 8: Tending to aging seniors in their homes a necessary and noble but undervalued occupation â?? rewarding but challenging, emotionally and physically. Debbie Gilli had always loved being around her grandmother and her in-laws. She simply liked older people. It wasnâ??t much of a stretch to become a caregiver. Anna Kivalu likes the look into other lived worlds she gets when helping clients. Lourdes Dobarganes gets clients to salsa dance with her to strengthen their balance and keep them moving. Sheâ??s also been known to have them hug trees for a positive energy experience. They have few complaints about their work, but would like to make more money

and have benefits like sick leave or workers compensation. Those obstacles are barriers to the supply of caregivers keeping up with the demand for their services.

Category

1. Photo gallery

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