

Writing funny

Sterling Haynes, MD

I remember comedian Lily Tomlin's great one liner, "No matter how cynical you become, it's never enough to keep up."

Writing funny can be difficult for an 85-year-old writer and retired doc. It can be due to motor failure and brakes, as my humor and satire loses horsepower and grinds to a halt. Is my clutch slipping? The power is gone and patches of oil remain scattered on my blank page.

Great lines do not come so easily now and I have to detour, re-enter the idea, and try to make it worthy of laughs. After I had a stroke 15 years ago I became aphasic and had a paralyzed right foot. My brain recovered and found a solution—words went through a maze and were filtered out—but I did communicate in an offbeat way. My right foot remains paralyzed but my brain, until recently, worked well in the humorous bent. Generally, I thought I got the better of the deal, until now.

The gray matter is still working and I am writing but grinding along very slowly when I try to recall recent incidents and time periods. Under the guidance of my alter ego and close associate, Al Zeimer from Biggar, Saskatchewan, I try to see the big sky and big picture. But the emptiness and vastness of my unconnected ideas clouds up and it starts to rain in my head. Al is a close companion, some

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of the time. A sun shower dampens my dusty thoughts but prairie winds buffer my synapses and then I can't remember. Internal lightning and the electrical storms short circuit words and I lose the thread of the conversation. My doc tells me I'm just getting old, but I know deep in my heart that "getting old" is a diagnosis that doesn't get any better. Docs don't seem to have a cure or pill for me. My \$5000 hearing aids offer a little solace. I can hear now; that is, when I remember to turn them on. My docs tell me I'm aging and getting an attitude problem, besides.

These same docs have been good to me, though. I couldn't walk a block—my right knee froze up in the heat of summer and wouldn't bend. They found a way to saw off my leg bone and thigh bone and hammer in a new titanium knee. They used what I suspected was crazy glue to cement it in. I could smell the epoxy cement in the Kelowna General Hospital surgery recovery room. They said they used a full tube but that it wouldn't have any lasting crazy glue effects on my brain.

Yes, for a while it was a big ouch, but I got over it in the hospital rehab ward. Those big, strong, Amazonian physiotherapists get you going fast. Their mantra is "no pain, no gain." I am a living believer! I lived through the big ouch. Now it's nose over toes and push yourself up out of the chair with your arms.

The bone doc said my new knee could last 15 years, but he didn't make a follow-up appointment to see him in 2025.

A few months ago other docs told



me I had "a big balloon of an abdominal aortic aneurysm ready to burst." They did scans and took measurements and sent them to the Mississauga factory to make me a customized new stent for my aorta. These good people in Ontario made it fast and shipped it west to my doc by UPS. Canada Post wasn't fast enough—they work 10 monkey-business days per parcel.

This stent was made of Gore-Tex and stainless steel; it's strong and waterproof now and does not leak. It's guaranteed in wet weather. My vascular surgery doc, who put it in, said it was good for 15 years. When I get to be 100 years old, things may start to break down.

My body may have reached my deadline by then—unless something else happy happens. I'll keep my fingers crossed and try to remember. The number 100 is hard to forget. **BTMJ**