

ENTERING THE TWILIGHT ZONE

I lay very still, mesmerized by the pulsing, vibrant colors and the hypnotic whooshing and drumming of my heart. It was incredible to witness the wonder and intricacies of my heartbeat on the screen of the echocardiogram machine.

I was forty-eight years old , busy, mostly happy, feeling great! I had the echocardiogram to placate my wonderful yet overly cautious doctor.

I strode out of the clinic cheerful and confident that all was well in my world!

A week later that world was turned upside down and sideways. I received a call from a cold, clinical cardiologist who informed me that I needed to have open heart surgery ASAP. My mitral valve wasn't working properly and needed to be repaired or replaced.

I was born in 1962 , healthy and happy! The only glitch was when our doctor discovered that I had a slight heart murmur. Heart murmurs are fairly common and normally remain mild or sometimes miraculously resolve themselves.

My heart murmur remained mild for years, lying dormant until 2011 ,

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when it erupted like a volcano! My mild case was now full-blown mitral valve regurgitation.

The doctor explained that my mitral valve was floppy and no longer functioning properly. Blood wasn't getting to my heart efficiently, causing it to strain and work double-time. If untreated I would go into heart failure and die.

I was now "Entering the Twilight Zone". Imagine the freakiness of entering a graveyard-quiet hospital at 4:30 AM. It was especially freaky since I felt completely healthy. The knowledge that I was going to have my chest cut open and my heart exposed and vulnerable during the surgery was unreal.

The freakiness continued when a kind hospital worker offered to direct me to my friend's room for a visit. Imagine their surprise when notified that I was the patient scheduled for open heart surgery!

The one positive was that the nurses repeatedly commented on how young I was. I guess a forty-eight year old does appear youthful when compared to the 80-90 year olds that usually have this operation.

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My surgeon was pleased with the outcome of the procedure. He repaired my mitral valve instead of replacing it. That meant I wouldn't have to take Warfarin, a tricky drug that has to be monitored closely. Certain foods, like greens, have to be eaten sparingly in order to keep the blood chemistry stable. Without the Warfarin a heart patient might develop a blood clot and stroke.

After a few days I was released from the hospital, anxiously heading home to begin the long, painful road to recovery.

Unfortunately following the surgery I began experiencing a lack of energy and difficulty breathing. I now felt like an actual heart patient!

Strangely my doctor wanted to arrange my surgery at the same hospital, using the same surgeon on almost the same date as my previous ordeal.

Since the definition of insanity is repeating an action expecting different results, I put my foot down. New hospital, new date, hopefully a new, improved surgeon-fingers crossed.

It's now 10 years later and I wish I could tell you that I lived 'happily ever after'.

4 Sadly that hasn't been the case.

I began suffering from bouts of tachycardia, rapid heart rates of up to 220 beats per minute as well as arrhythmia, erratic heart rhythms.

Due to these events I've had various procedures , ingest 13 pills daily , and have visited the Emergency Room so often that the doctors are starting to recognize me.

All this to no avail , as the attacks randomly surface and stubbornly persist regardless of anything the medical profession throws at it.

This ongoing drama has taught me to ask questions, speak up for myself and be my own advocate-persisting in resisting my fate.