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Another MSK Fragment: My Harris ... Chair???

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NOW WITHOUT HESITATION

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Before I became ill I rarely had occasion to visit the homes of friends who were fighting cancer. So although I must have been in homes that had been rehabbed more or less substantially to make the patient's life work more smoothly, I probably didn't really focus on those features as part of my friends' fight against cancer. Among the things I certainly missed were many changes in clothing; cancer changes your body, pretty much whether you want it to or not. With the benefit of more understanding of what I was seeing, however, here's at least some of what I've noticed (leaving out the crucial, crucial contribution of one's friends and family, and for me especially those of my dear wife Teresa):

Grab bars: Those shiny bars that may accompany toilets? Very helpful, and not just to provide something to grab on to, though that by itself is a big help. It turns out that in getting on and off a toilet, the exact number of inches above the ground that will give you the greatest leverage is very important. You can have all the strength you need, but not be able to bring it to bear – unless you have grab bars to provide you with intermediate help as you get up. (For similar reasons, other aspects of toilet design, including how far above the china bowl your actual seat rests, may turn out to be important too.) You may also want to acquire a bell – not the Victorian kind that you pick up and ring, perhaps embarrassing everyone in sight, but the modern kind with electronic links between the call buttons set up for you and your family so that when your grab bar saves you from some problem, someone will arrive to help!

A cane: I now have a cane, specifically my mother-in-law's cane from a bout of illness mostly in the past. (Very generous of her.) I don't actually need a cane; that is, I could get the leverage and support I need by other,

cruder means, like leaning against the wall. But the cane, which has adjustable buttons, is more adaptable. It may also provide a new area for my emerging fashion sensibility (you remember the arrival of the Croc's, right?); at any rate, my wife asked me if I preferred wood or metal, and a new cane will arrive as soon as tomorrow. and then of course there are the models with concealed weapons (all right, I admit my fighting days, which I don't recall ever actually beginning, have now definitively ended). Fantasies aside, a cane is useful. Its only flaw as far as I've seen is that it is so useful that once you have one you use it readily and frequently, and in the process you do get slowed down. (I also have a great, five-foot-long walking stick that my son and his family gave me; it arrived before the recent medical pressures and in this post I was focused on medical interventions, but I very much appreciated it too.)

A staircase chairlift: This device, of course, anyone seeing it would recognize as a health care device. So I'm writing about it not to reveal its secrets but to celebrate its virtues. And they are many! The one we've rented really does exactly one thing but it does that one thing very straightforwardly: after installation by just one person, it proceeds to carry you up the stairs and down, again and again. No turns (though on a bigger staircase those would be necessary), but a discreet alarm that will catch the attention of someone else in the household so that if something didn't work you wouldn't be stranded midway up the stairs. A safety belt, which you could get away with not using, but why would you?

Now the fact is that I didn't absolutely need a chairlift either. Using a combination of stepping sideways and adding to the leg force I could exert with a firm grip on the bannisters, I could and did make it up the stairs, and down was quite a bit easier. Especially going up, however, I was seriously winded for up to as much as half an hour. That was time I had better ways to use.

So I'm really, really, happy with my staircase chairlift. I felt that under the circumstances, I needed to give it a name. But what name? Well, I felt the chairlift was doing work that's typically done by men, but not exclusively so; and that the chairlift also reminded me of clothes I'm accustomed to wearing (but that women probably wear too). So its name is "Harris," as in "Harris Tweed," and when I want to change floors I tell the people with me that "Harris and I are going" up or

down. And just to further mark his/her/its value to me, here is a picture of Harris [plus me], provided that Teresa's technical skills enable us to post it.



And one question for all of you: if a lot of people started posting this picture along with funny remarks, would the picture count as a meme?
