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

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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?