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Life Stories



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The Gift of Grace

by Karyn McGovern



Nobody enjoys unsolicited advice, but the nugget of wisdom I am about to impart is priceless and born out of significant experience: never break an ankle.

You're welcome.

This is good advice, as I well know, because I recently broke mine and, boy howdy, I wish I hadn't. Sadly, I don't have an exciting story about how it happened. It didn't occur while I was climbing the majestic Provincetown dunes, nor when I was boarding a ferry to Martha's Vineyard wearing a perilously high pair of Jimmy Choos, nor seamlessly sprinting the "Women Running Wild 5K" in Osterville - as if I could sprint, never mind seamlessly.

No, all I did was walk out the front door. That's it.

I walked outside wearing flat shoes in the afternoon sunshine, moving at a leisurely rate. Next thing I knew, I was face down on the porch, with my feet tangled behind me in a grotesque pretzel of crushed bone and swelling flesh, blinded by the most horrific pain I've ever known.

Frantically, I tried to right myself, but my legs were not working properly. I knew professional help would be required, but my shoulder bag had flown ahead of me when I landed. I commando-crawled toward it, extracted my phone and called an ambulance.

I was vaguely aware that someone was screaming, which was really annoying. It wasn't until I tried speaking into the phone that I realized the screamer was me. I was spectacular. In fact, there may still be a faint haze of profanity hovering over my porch.

My thanks to Hyannis Fire and Rescue for arriving in a scant few minutes. The EMTs pretended not to notice the silty stains my clothes sustained in the fall or my wailing in abject misery. They were gentle and kind, mercifully ensuring I had something coursing through my veins to dull the pain in less time than it took for me to apologize for my decorum (or manifest lack thereof).

Fast-forward a couple of weeks. I'd been X-rayed, declared broken and had surgery at Cape Cod Hospital to repair the breaks. I did my time in the hospital and then did a stint at The Pavillion Rehabilitation Center in Hyannis. My ankle is held together by something resembling an elaborate Erector Set, deftly wrapped in the new must-have footwear for summer, a blue fiberglass cast.

Adding to my stylish arsenal of accessories, I have a walker to hop around where I'm able and a wheelchair for the rest of the time. The children find these amusing; the cat does not. I've navigated the aisles of a couple of stores with varying degrees of success, but it is a challenge.

Last week, I used a motorized cart at Stop & Shop, which was kind of humiliating, especially when it beeped upon being thrown into reverse. Frankly, this whole debacle has been the most humbling, undignified experience of my life, and that, I assure you, is saying something.

In addition to the "never break your ankle" edict, I've learned a few other things. For example, I learned to ask for help and, moreover, to accept it. I've learned that the hip bone and, indeed, every other bone in your body actually is connected to the ankle bone. This became obvious as soon as I tried to move after I fell.

I've learned that things really can always be worse, and that one must never, ever tempt the universe by asking foolish questions like "What else could go wrong?"

Also, I've learned that absolutely nobody wants to see my scar or run their fingers along the subcutaneous trail of screws holding my bones together.

I thank every person who helped care for my shattered bones and equally shattered ego along the way. Further, I thank those who called faithfully, drove me around, visited, looked after my children or brought me flowers, proper food, reading material, clean clothes or chocolate.

They have gifted me with grace so great I can scarcely get my head around it. It may not be the kind of grace that can keep me from falling down again ... but it's the kind of grace that keeps me from going under.

Karyn McGovern was born near Boston, Massachusetts, grew up and attended schools on Cape Cod. A regular Cape Cod Times columnist for six years, she writes about small town living, raising her children as a single mother and her travel experiences.

Karyn and her two children live with an extremely opinionated rabbit. She divides her time between Cape Cod and an apartment in London.

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