

Commentary... Everything happens all at once

By Erik Dolson
Correspondent

There is something about the fall season that encourages me to become active. Change in temperature, angle of sunlight, return of rain — I have no clue why, but it's been constant over the years. I start to prepare the cave for winter.

I would hike South Sister in September or early October, jokingly calling the climb to 10,300 feet my annual cardiac stress test. Exercise-induced asthma made that a challenge a couple of times, but inhalers allowed me to get to the top. Some efforts were stymied by early snow, like that I see on the mountain this afternoon.

My friend Ali and I hoped to make that hike this year, until we ran out of time, knees, and fitness. Instead of the mountain, my chores stacked up toward the middle of September.

There was a race over Labor Day weekend that was fun, until the engine oil pressure dropped going around high-speed turns. I came off the track. Low oil pressure results in catastrophic engine failure and is not a problem to ignore.

A concrete slab is being poured for my too-long-postponed shop. The building itself will go up as I can afford it, but it's time to get started after 12 years of procrastination, a record even for me.

Sometime soon, Jake and I will drive down to Chico, California to pick up Jake's new (to him) race car, a pretty Spec Miata. We'll use my trailer and I think we can make the round trip in two days. Jake is anxious to bring the car home and start racing — he ran a fine time of 1:30 at Portland International Raceway in his daily driver Mustang.

My boat Foxy has to be moved off my buoy and to a moorage in the next couple of weeks. There's work to do on her, too, before weather really sets in. In years past she's spent winter in Victoria, B.C., but I just don't see that as an option. Canada could close again at any time with the boat on one side of the border and me on the other. It happened to friends.

I still thought I might try South Sister this year, but my training after the 10k last April was not successful. My wind was gone and would just not return, no matter how often I hit the trails.

Ali and I hiked up Black Butte in early August and it was slow and laborious for me (though easy for her).

It was the same up Tumalo Mountain a couple of weeks later. A couple of 10k runs up Whychus Canyon failed too, becoming 5k walks, and at the end of August in Friday Harbor, I walked 10k after running became impossible.

In denial that I was growing old, I decided asthma was kicking in again, though my go-to drugs didn't much help. The last time I'd had this kind of difficulty, I'd eaten a bite of the "little apple of death" in Costa Rica and lost a third of my blood. So I decided to get a blood workup done again and see my doctor. We had an appointment a week ago Thursday.

She scheduled me for a stress test, which occurred late the next day, Friday. They hooked me up to an EKG and took an electrocardiogram of my heart. This showed that, at rest, my heart was fine. But during exertion, I had a 35-percent "ejection fraction" from the left ventricle that supplies blood to the body, instead of 60 to 70 percent.

Which explained my difficulty in hiking up my mountains. The doctor in charge of the stress test scheduled an angiogram for the first thing Monday morning, when they pushed a catheter into my wrist and up into my heart.

The left anterior descending artery ("widow maker," one nurse called it) was nearly 90-percent blocked. So, they used a balloon to push out the

walls and accumulated milk shakes, and put in a stent to keep it open.

Ali took me home 10 hours later, not much worse for wear. I was told not to lift heavy things with my right hand (where the catheter went into my wrist), and if I had a squirting bleed there to put pressure on it and call 911. So far, no leaks. There's no pain and a couple of (doctor approved) two-mile walks were easier than a couple of weeks ago.

I'm about as lucky as a man can be. Cardiologists were emphatic that I've not had a heart attack. Tests indicate no heart damage. Blood flow simply could not keep up when demand went up. Like that oil pressure problem in the race car: lines just not flowing fast enough, but no engine damage.

My facetious "I climb mountains as a cardiac stress test" turned out to be true, giving me early warning and preventing a fatal or disabling coronary. Until last week I was lifting weights and walking my trails, and will do so again.

And it's fall. I do love the fall, even though the season sometimes puts more on my plate than I can possibly consume. A week after doctors rammed a supporting mesh into an artery of my heart, I'm contemplating what I'll do next instead of mourning what I no longer can.

For more of Erik Dolson's work, visit <https://erikdolson.substack.com>.

VACCINATION: Visitors must show proof of having shots

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Oregon Health Authority's immunization registry.

- A screenshot or printout from an electronic medical record showing vaccination status.

- A St. Charles Health System badge with a COVID vaccination sticker.

Unvaccinated visitors will only be allowed under extraordinary circumstances. This could include a visitor to a patient who is at the end of life, a parent of a pediatric patient, a "support person" as defined by Oregon law, or an emergency response worker who may need to enter a hospital or clinic while on duty.

Currently, patients who are positive for COVID-19

are not allowed any visitors. This will continue to be the case regardless of a visitor's vaccination status. Virtual visits for COVID-19 patients are still encouraged to support the family's involvement.

All other patients have the right to at least one fully vaccinated visitor per day provided the visitor is 12 or older. That same visitor may come and go throughout the same day.

"We want nothing more than to return to 'normal,' but we're just not there yet," Absalon said. "As a health system, we must continue to be hypervigilant about controlling the spread of the virus in our facilities. We owe that to our patients, many of whom are medically fragile, and to our hard-working caregivers, who put themselves at risk every day to care for our community."

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