

Two Incidents

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The first incident occurred Sunday, June 11, 2023. Around six in the evening, I decided to take some empty bottles down to the first floor where the recycling bin is located. I took the elevator, tossed the bottles in the bin, then thought I'd walk up to the second floor to check my mailbox, as I hadn't checked it for a couple of days.

There's an outside car ramp that leads to a second floor parking area, and I walked up the ramp. When I reached the second floor, I began to feel a little light-headed. I couldn't understand why, as I had never had quite such a feeling before.

Walking to the main door that leads into my apartment building, I found I was having trouble breathing. I was breathing faster and faster, but couldn't seem to get enough oxygen. I wasn't getting dizzy, but I was getting weaker. My mind was racing. I knew if I got inside the building, I could sit down on one of the chairs in the lobby and catch my breath. I felt I needed to do so quickly.

I keyed in the security code, the door opened, and I entered the building. My legs were becoming unsteady and my mind was a whirl of uncertainty. What was I experiencing? Why was I experiencing it? And most importantly, what could I do to stop it? Right now! I was breathing even faster, and I thought if I could just lean against a wall briefly, maybe I could catch my breath and recover. As it turned out, that was wishful thinking. I leaned momentarily on a wall next to the mail room. I was



very unsteady, I was frantically gasping for air, and then I completely lost consciousness.



I fell over backward and banged my head on the marble floor.

My glasses went flying. I was out cold. But, I was unconscious only briefly, maybe just five or six seconds. I could not comprehend what had just happened to me.



(It was amazing that a security camera next to the mail room caught all the action and recorded

it. And equally amazing, some time later, my son (Tim) saw the camera and asked the building management if a video of the incident had been made, and if so, could he could get a copy of it. The video was found, and these photos are screen shots from it.)

Then I sat up, tried to figure out what had transpired, put on my glasses, and carefully got up on my feet. I was breathing normally and except for a good-sized bump on my skull, I felt okay. In the mail room, I checked for mail, then I took the elevator back up to my apartment. I was amazed I felt so well, aside from the bump, of course.

I fixed myself a meal, then watched TV for the rest of the evening. It seemed unreal. I had lost consciousness, fallen over, banged my head on the floor, but afterward I felt just fine.

My thinking later was I may have had blood clots in my lungs and my fall may have actually dislodged them. That was my guess. If true, then the fall more than likely saved my life.

The next morning, I thought I should go to the hospital and find out if there were some health problems I should know about and deal with. I was in the hospital a couple of days, but no specific conclusions were reached. The cause of my fainting was not determined.

When I told my sons of the incident, they thought I was likely to experience another episode of some sort, but I didn't think so. I thought the fall was a one-time fluke and I wouldn't have any further difficulties. But, not getting any conclusive reason for the fall, while I was being examined at the hospital, was troubling. If I fell once, why wouldn't I fall again?

Days went by, and weeks. The fall was a thing of the past. Three and a half months had come and gone since the incident. Then on Saturday, September 30th, I got in the shower about 9:30 am. As pleasant, warm water showered down over me, I once again felt a hint of lightheadedness. Oh, no. Was I about to have another incident? Yes, indeed.

Fortunately, what I was experiencing was familiar. I knew I must take immediate action. I quickly turned off the shower, sat down on the floor of the shower stall, put my arms on the built-in seat, and lay my head on my arms. In moments, I was unconscious.

If I had not had the earlier experience, I wouldn't have known to take those actions, I would have slipped into unconsciousness while standing, and I would have fallen to the tile floor. In all likelihood, I would have cracked my head on the edge of the seat, and that could have been my demise.

I don't know how long I sat on the shower floor, but some time later, I regained consciousness. I was in a very awkward and

uncomfortable position, and I wanted to get out of the shower. Once again, I had no energy whatsoever, and it was a big effort to just move. I pushed open the shower door and dragged myself slowly onto the bathroom rug. I was exhausted after doing this, and, lying on the rug, I slipped back into unconsciousness once again.

I would occasionally regain consciousness, but just for a short moment or two. I wanted to move, but I had no energy to do so. I was still soaking wet.

There were no thoughts about calling for help. I couldn't reach my cell phone, which was being recharged on the bathroom counter just three feet above where I was lying. Yelling would be useless. Nobody would hear me, and besides, I didn't have the energy to yell. I needed all my energy just to breathe.

More time passed and at one point I thought I might be able to crawl out of the bathroom into my bedroom. I couldn't get up and walk. That was impossible. Slowly, slowly, I struggled to traverse the short distance.

When I finally got myself next to my bed, I was completely exhausted. Though I wanted to, there was no way I could climb up onto the bed. I continued to be in and out of consciousness. I remember thinking I was going to die – I was *quite certain* I was going to die – and I didn't want to be discovered in a heap next to the bed. I desperately wanted to get on the bed, but I simply didn't have the strength.

I remember each breath was an effort. I'd breathe in and there would be pain. Not excruciating pain, but very noticeable pain. Then I'd breathe out. One moment I was conscious, the next I wasn't. The thought struck me: dying won't be so difficult. One breath in, there'll be some discomfort, then I'll be gone. It will be that easy.

I was on the carpet by my bed for quite a while. Eventually, I thought I could indeed muster enough strength to grab at the blanket and pull myself up onto the bed. I struggled, and made it. Now I can die in a respectable position, I thought, though I was still buck naked, but by then I was no longer wet.

The pattern repeated over and over. A breath in. A breath out. Consciousness. Unconsciousness. Wondering when a breath would be my last. I didn't see my life playing out before me. I didn't think about my sons. I didn't worry about unfinished business. All I could focus on was breathing. I couldn't think of anything else. In those moments, nothing else mattered. It was not a time for reasoned contemplation. It was a time for getting that next essential breath of air.

More time passed. I was thinking, get this over with. Please. If it's my time to go, let it be. Maybe the next breath. Maybe the one after that.

Perhaps some of the time passed in sleep. I don't know. Unconsciousness is unconsciousness.

And then, like I had just awakened from a cruel nightmare, I could breathe without pain. I could open my eyes and think about something other than another breath of air. Had I escaped death? It seemed I had.

I got up, put something on, and checked the clock. It said 6 o'clock. My strange episode had lasted eight and a half hours! Once again, there were no after effects: no pain, no foggy thinking. It was as if the whole incident hadn't even happened. It was like I had just watched a horror movie on TV. Cautiously, I exited my bedroom. I went to the kitchen and cooked something to eat. I hadn't eaten for 24 hours.

Later in the evening after watching TV, I went back to bed and had a good night's sleep. The next morning, I went back to the

hospital. This time, after several days and numerous tests, it was confirmed: I had two blood clots, one in each lung, and there was one or more clots in my legs.

I was prescribed a blood thinner (Xarelto) and I was kept in the hospital until ultra-sound readings showed the clots were gone.

Both incidents were more like bad dreams than reality.

Something happened to me that I had never experienced before. I had reached a moment where forces I didn't understand had taken over my life. I didn't want them, but they were imposed on me.

As I get older, it seems there are a number of forces that can pop up unexpectedly and surprise me. I feel lucky to have overcome them.

But now, I wonder when or if *another* surprise will strike. Later on today? Next week? Next year? No, I don't think so. I'm quite convinced a Xarelto a day will keep the blood clots away.

Life is precious. Don't waste it. It has an end. And it will come. One of these days.