

Significant Conversations

“What brought you to the Emergency Room?”

Shortness of breath, pain in my chest, and light headedness.

“When did this occur?”

Little over an hour ago. Before that, a week ago playing pickleball.

“Do you or your family of origin have a history of heart issues?”

No.

Three hours later, the attending emergency doctor says:

“We can find nothing wrong with your heart and chest. You seem healthy. Schedule a stress test to see if there are any hidden issues, though in cases like yours, you might not find a cause. We don’t know. In the meantime, take a low dose of Pepcid.”

Relief and concern as I wait for the Stress Test. My mind does a number. I look up symptoms and possible remedies. I’m healthier than most 76-year-olds. This must be a blip. I’ve never had a major health issue before.

Suddenly I feel old. My kids are concerned and call every couple of days. I’m not concerned, except when I am, but then I mostly feel fine, except when I walk in the cold. There are seven remedies that are non-invasive, but I am nervous if I must have a procedure.

My Stress Test went fine as I breathed deeply but was not short of breath. But my chest discomfort went from a one to a three. Because of that, they want me to take a second Stress Test with an injection of radioactive dye to see if there is a blockage somewhere.

At the second stress test, I have the same technician and we have a good laugh, though this time I am breathing hard by the end as she pushes me into a seventh minute.

We swap book titles we have enjoyed, and when she finds out I like spy novels, she blurts out, “Have you seen ‘The Americans’?”

I say I watched the first two seasons and loved the sex scenes, but it became too bloody and I skipped to the last season.

“Yea, the sex scenes are good, but haven’t finished the series. My husband said that because I’m Romanian, I’m probably a sleeper agent!”

I tell her I have met a real CIA agent and she eagerly listens to the Paris mustache affair.

“Wow. They really do this stuff.”

Five days later I have heard nothing. A friend says that it is a good sign I wasn’t carted off to the hospital right away. My wife reminds me that the ER doctor said there might not be a cause. My inner conversation performs intricate gymnastics that returns to center through a calming mantra. Still, I find it hard to concentrate while waiting and impossible to work on my novel. Driving for Lyft at least gives me a focus.

Eight days after the second stress test, I meet with my doctor.

“It showed positive, which means your heart has restricted blood flow. Schedule with a cardiologist and they will inject a dye and place a stent if needed. In the meantime, no strenuous activity.”

Feeling more at peace knowing both what the next steps are and that the procedure is fairly common. Of course, there will be more conversations.