

## WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS

At the age of 21,  
I was the picture of health.  
In a nanosecond  
I became a statistic.

Thrown from a car,  
wrapped around a telephone pole,  
unconscious, severe concussion,  
left ankle broken,  
left leg jammed upward  
smashing my pelvis  
into tiny pieces.

Six weeks in traction  
tethered to a hospital bed,  
25-pound weights on my leg  
to try to pull it back down.

Eventually the fractures healed.  
I was discharged with a limp.  
I left the hospital on crutches to convalesce,  
my skeleton permanently imbalanced.

Despite having overheard visitors whisper,  
“Doctors say she’ll never walk again”,  
I became determined not to let  
any impairments hold me back.

Over the years I went on to marry,

moved to Canada,  
had two babies,  
earned graduate degrees,  
became a single mother.  
Moved us all to Florida for work  
that put my girls through college.

Once the nest was empty,  
I began a new career.  
Answered an advertisement  
from a German drug company,  
was hired to spend a year abroad  
writing pharmaceutical reports.

One year turned into six.  
I was having lots of fun,  
business trips to Italy,  
Switzerland, and UK.  
Personal trips to Vienna,  
Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam.

Then a corporate merger transferred me  
to work in New Jersey.  
Within 18 months we merged again.  
I was downsized overnight.

After unemployment benefits expired  
and I had time to think,  
I took a calculated risk,  
became a freelance writer.

Over the next 23 years,  
I earned more on my own  
than I ever did being employed.  
I used that windfall to  
help my sister  
build a house  
for her golden years.

One night in 2012,  
while lying wide awake  
toying with retirement  
in my California flat,  
I decided to get up  
to make some calculations.  
Lost my balance, fell headlong into  
an unforgiving corner.

My head was bruised  
for several days,  
but I managed to carry on  
with plans to move to Minnesota  
to be near three grandchildren.

Next year I was tested for sleep apnea  
to lower my risk of stroke,  
but before the mask arrived  
a silent clot crept up during sleep,  
earned me a ride to the ER.

My right arm limp, I'd lost my grip,  
most speech and memory gone.

Tests were done to see  
how much damage had been done.

Overnight in hospital my arm somehow revived,  
as did much of speech and memory.  
But the stroke had left more subtle damage  
neurologists could not pinpoint.  
So they adjudged me “good enough”,  
discharging me to home health care:  
six weeks of physical,  
occupational, social therapies  
to get me back in shape.

Six months after I’d had the stroke,  
I fell into my sunken living room,  
hitting my head hard on a bookcase.  
As I fell, thought quietly,  
“I’m going to break my neck.”  
Genuine surprise for me!  
Only another concussion.  
More tests ensued. The MRI  
determined I was fine.

In 2018, I was diagnosed  
with atrial fibrillation.  
The cardiologist then pronounced,  
“Now we know the reason for your stroke,”  
prescribed more pills to my regimen  
to eliminate palpitations.

The next year I fell again

just walking on the grass,  
bruised my chin, jarred all the teeth  
in my left upper jaw.

This fall led to three root canals,  
a 6-month bone graft, and then  
an implant screwed into my skull---  
it felt like a jackhammer.

After all the head injuries,  
the stroke, and ongoing age,  
my brain's executive function  
is still impaired.

More and more I can only do  
one thing at a time,  
listen to a conversation or watch TV,  
but not both simultaneously.  
I also have more difficulty  
to find the right expression.  
Sometimes it takes me several days  
to finally remember a specific one I want.

Over the past 57 years,  
the stresses of walking imbalanced  
wore the cartilage off  
one knee and both ankles,  
Now I'm in my twilight years  
I need ankle braces, a cane or two  
to help to keep me mobile.

Two years ago when I began  
to crawl upstairs on hands and knees,

it was time to relinquish denial.  
My house no longer served my needs.  
I sold it and moved on.

Despite all the hardships  
that can be traced  
to that split second long ago,  
I can honestly say I'm feeling blessed  
in this Covid-19 crisis.

I have a family who cares for me,  
a roof over my imperfect head,  
a comfy bed for naps and nighttime,  
pension for food and meds.

Millions are now far less fortunate.  
I wish I could help them all...

Bravo! to our strong governors  
who locked their economies down.

Bravo! to the first responders:  
policemen, firemen, EMT.

Bravo! to nurses, doctors,  
the therapists, and the aides.

Bravo! to the unsung heroes who  
daily risk life and limb  
to keep trains and buses running,  
deliver food and meds to stores.

Thumbs down to Trump who procrastinates:

“Buck up and do your job!

“You’ve held the lemons way too long.

“Now make the lemonade!”