**Knee Replacement From a Woman’s Perspective**

So, I finally did a brave thing. After twenty years of suffering with an injury sustained during Hurricane Charley in 2004 [another story] it was time for a total knee replacement.

I read the pamphlets. I watched the chirpy videos. I followed the pre-op instructions like a woman prepping for sainthood or giving birth—same difference. And yet, what I *really* needed to know was never mentioned ahead of time.

**The Mistakes Began with the Walker**

Let’s start with what I was *told* would matter: picking up a functional walker. I foolishly opted for a stylish one with wheels, a basket, and a seat that was adorable but completely worthless, because it was dangerous. I had to scramble to get a cheap functional one at the last minute. Like, it was still in the box, in the trunk of my hubby’s car, when I was released to go home after surgery. We had to use a rolling office chair to get me from the car into the house. I fainted several times along the way. A walker of any kind was not my friend at that point.

Then came the suggestions: get a portable potty [no one said where to put it], and an ice machine. No, not for margaritas, darn it. It’s an ice therapy machine that circulates freezing water around my pitiful knee to lessen the pain and swelling.

**The Need For A Butt Load Of Pillows**

That first week? Thank you for asking. I couldn’t escape my mattress without inventing new curse words. I couldn’t move my knee. Not by myself, anyway. I needed around the clock nursing care and a ton of pillows. One of which supported my poor knee from my hip to my heel.

Enter *Strong Like Bull***,** my heroic caregiver, who dispensed my pain meds throughout the day and night because meds aren’t given at the same time. Oh, no. Some are twelve hours apart, some six, some four. Others I wanted to beg for earlier than was prescribed. Don’t judge.

**Gravity Was Not My Friend**

It was my nemesis. Every time nature called, it turned into a tactical operation. Regardless of the time, day or night, *Strong Like Bull* [SLB] gently lifted my leg [and I mean *gently*] over the side of the bed, listen to my howls of distress, while apologizing the whole time, and helped me fumble with my nightgown to make it two steps to the portable potty. Yes, *that’s* where the portable potty belonged - right next to the bed, close enough to allow my extremely painful leg to stretch out at a straight angle, while not peeing on my nightgown. [Don’t even think about wearing panties or pajamas—that’s plain old stupid.]

Forget toilet paper too. We got a large pack of white cotton cloths from Costco. They’re washable and it’s only pee. Keep an open mind. I was happier reaching for a rag draped over the arm of the portable potty then fumbling for the toilet paper that fell on the floor and rolled halfway under the bed. Mark my words.

**Pain, Progress, and Netflix**

I endured natural childbirth three times. So I wasn’t afraid of a little old knee replacement. I should have been. The nerve pain alone was something I wasn’t prepared for. They said discomfort. Nerve endings screaming through layers of healing tissue are a bit more than discomfort. It’s a symphony of colorful adjectives. Thank God for drugs . . . err . . . I mean pain meds.

And the emotional part? That wasn’t in the brochure either. Progress felt invisible at first. Just me, the cold therapy machine, my blessed pain meds and a physical therapist whose job seemed to be part recovery and part medieval torture.

My only real control was the TV remote. *Netflix* was my best friend. I binge watched all five seasons and 62 episodes of *Breaking Bad*. Then *Better Call Saul* and *Criminal Minds*. It was entertainment. That’s all I cared about.

**Five Pre-Surgery Self Care Tips for Ladies**

**[That No One Tells You]**

1. **Stop shaving** your legs as far in advance as possible and, for God’s sake, do not wax anything. Trust me, when those prickly hairs grow back and you’re stuck in bed, you’ll curse every one of them. I’m speaking from experience here.
2. **Get your hair done**. Cut and color it right before surgery. You aren’t going anywhere near a hair salon for at least twelve weeks. Your knee won’t be ready. Even after twelve weeks, it’s still going to be uncomfortable. Been there, done that.
3. **Cancel the lash appointment.** False eyelashes? Remove them for at least twelve weeks. Even after three months, my knee was still uncomfortable lying on that lash table for an hour.
4. **Get a pedicure.** Yes, do it the week before surgery and choose a bold, cheerful color. It’s the only fun you’re going to have for a couple of months. At least your toes will make you smile.
5. **Ditch the acrylic nails.** Short natural nails are easier and less annoying. You’re going to be seeing a lot of them, especially holding the remote control. But definitely keep a nail kit and some tweezers near your comfortable recliner. You know why.

**Post Surgery Tips for Friends and Doctors**

At about six weeks, I finally took charge of my medications. Until then SLB did everything: cooking, laundry, grocery shopping, replacing the melted ice bags in my ice machine, and comforting me at every stage of this painful, emotional journey.

It would have been lovely if someone dropped off a casserole. No one did. People are busy. But if you’re reading this and know someone having knee surgery, here’s your golden rule: *take them food and alcohol*. [The alcohol is for the SLB caregiver.]

And to the doctors out there—please, I beg you: create a handout titled, *“What Women Really Want to Know Before Knee Surgery.”*

We don’t need chirpy pamphlets. We need *truth.* With a little humor. And maybe a bottle of hot pink nail polish.