

The Orange County Register

OPINION

The Orange Grove: Early present: a stroke that wasn't

Dec. 19, 2008 Updated Aug. 21, 2013 1:17 p.m.

By EILEEN SPATZ / A writer in San Clemente



Write a letter to the editor

Letters to the Editor: E-mail to letters@ocregister.com. Please provide your name and telephone number (telephone numbers will not be published). Letters of about 200 words will be given preference. Letters will be edited for length, grammar and clarity.

Isn't it interesting, the unexpected things that will launch us into a new and fresh perspective of what Christmas is all about. A while ago, I was lamenting my lackluster mood entering the holiday

season. I just didn't feel up to all the shopping, wrapping, decorating or baking. I would hear a Christmas song on the radio and change the station because it annoyed me. But all it takes is a significant event to suddenly snap a person into focusing sharply on what is important.

Recently, I had been dealing with high blood pressure, most likely brought on by the stress of watching those talking heads on CNBC freaking us out with dire prognostications of an impending new Great Depression. With each 600-point drop on the Dow, my blood pressure shot up 50 points. With each glance at zillow.com, and such a pretty picture of my house - trash cans on the curb and all - and seeing only a downward trend in my home's value, I would feel my heart race.

So when I had a sudden and violent onset of vertigo I naturally assumed it was The Big One, a massive stroke that was going to put me down. I grabbed my living will and told my oldest to call 911. So there I was, laying on the couch, as instructed, feet elevated, with no makeup, old sweats, bad hair and squinty eyes (the room was spinning like I'd been on a bender) when the Fire Authority showed up at my house in about three minutes flat.

The paramedic was a fella I'd met via Match.com early this year. He is gorgeous and young (thus my nickname for him has been "Fireboy"), and we have remained text buddies all year. I was so mortified at him seeing me looking like Lucy Ricardo wasted on Vitameatavegamin instead of like a sexy cougar that I could not even make eye contact. So, alas, Fireboy drove me to the hospital, probably glancing in his rearview mirror at the dizzy hag in the back of the ambulance, wondering why the heck he ever sent me an online Wink in the first place.

OK, so I spent three days in the hospital while they ran test after test on me. In the end, after ruling out all the scary stuff, the nice

neurologist stated simply that I had a viral infection in my inner ear. Hallelujah! I still have some miles on my tires.

Which brings me to my newly acquired focus on the blessings of the season. While I was confined to that hospital bed, I witnessed and heard so much suffering in the rooms around me. I heard cries for help, sobs during the night, anguish in the eyes of visiting loved ones. I heard "code blues" in Emergency announced over the loud speaker. Some of the people with me in the stroke ward will not make it home, or will be extremely disabled. I was given good news, and I am grateful beyond words, but my heart aches for those less fortunate.

Watching how hard the doctors, nurses, and technicians worked, and the obvious dedication to their callings, was truly inspiring. They sincerely care about helping their patients, and it is exhausting and relentless work.

The outpouring of support, love and caring I received was the best Christmas present I could ever ask for. Just little things, like my daughter sneaking in a chocolate shake, a bag of popcorn and my three favorite candy bars meant so much to me. Neighbors showing up with flowers and smiles, my employer and co-workers sending plants, calling me, visiting, taking care of my daughter. The concerned calls from my family and friends offering their assistance. These were my Christmas presents this year.

Once I was home, bouncing like a pinball off the walls, the banister, the door jams and unable to drive or work for about a week because of lingering dizziness, I didn't panic at the sight of boxed Christmas decorations. Eventually, the house will be decorated, the tree will be lit, and the holiday joy will be fully present in our home. I am so blessed to be healthy and loved, and that will suffice for Christmas this year.

