Good Leg to Stand On

Pain started in my knees and legs, and once again it was becoming difficult to walk. For so many years, pain had been a constant companion—first cancer, now this. Like most people, I tried to manage it on my own. Tylenol, back injections—things would help for a while, but the pain always came back. The frustration built slowly until the only option left was to tough it out. I wanted to be there for my kids. Giving up wasn't an option.

Climbing stairs became difficult. Walking became a chore. Still, I pushed through, determined to live as normally as possible.

One afternoon, I was in the front yard picking up limbs when I tripped and fell.

The pain hit instantly—sharp and overwhelming—shooting through both legs. I couldn't move. What bothered me almost as much as the pain was the thought of someone seeing me lying there. I didn't want help. I didn't want attention. So, I crawled to the side of the house, pulled myself up against the wall, and tried to look like I belonged there. I'm not sure how convincing an old man leaning against a house really looks—but I gave it my best shot.

I pulled out my phone and called Cathy. No answer. I called again. In that moment, I started thinking maybe I should call an ambulance. On the next try, she picked up. "Cathy, I need help. I'm outside by the garage."

That old commercial came to mind—the one where the woman says, *"I've fallen and I can't get up."* I used to think it was exaggerated, even a little ridiculous. But lying there on the ground, unable to move, I understood it completely.

Cathy came outside and immediately knew something was wrong. She tried to help me up, but the moment I shifted my weight, the pain dropped me right back down. That's when we both knew.

This wasn't something you walk off.

The pain was just above my kneecaps—what I later learned were the quadriceps tendons—but at the time all I knew was my legs had quit on me. I couldn't stand. I couldn't walk. Crawling was the only option, and even that came with a price.
She couldn't lift me.

And I wasn't getting up on my own.

That’s when she called 911.

A few minutes later, I heard the ambulance coming, and for the first time, I wasn’t thinking about anything except how fast they could get there.

Anyone who’s been to an emergency room knows the chaos. Doctors, nurses, tests—people moving in every direction. They took X-rays and couldn’t find anything broken, so they decided to send me home with pain medication.

Cathy wasn’t having it.

“What do you mean he’s going home?”

My head was foggy from the medication, but even I knew something wasn’t right. Later, we learned just how close that call was. An orthopedic intern took another look at the X-rays and examined my legs. His conclusion changed everything. I had torn the quadriceps tendons in both legs.

If he hadn’t stepped in, I would have been sent home.

Instead, I was taken into surgery, where they reattached the tendons. A week later, I was moved to a rehabilitation hospital, where I spent two weeks learning how to do basic things again—getting in and out of bed, using the bathroom, working with a walker—all with both legs in casts.

Simple things weren’t simple anymore.

Back at home, Jonathon and a friend built a ramp from the garage into the house so I could get in and out more easily. It took up a good portion of my woodworking space, but at that point, I wasn’t in a position to complain.

Then, just when things were starting to improve, I fell again.

We had just made it through Christmas. The casts were off, replaced with braces, and I was starting to feel like I was making progress. Then I did something I shouldn’t have done and went down hard.

This time, I heard it.

The stitches tearing.

That’s a sound you don’t forget.

Lying on the kitchen floor, unable to move, I called for Cathy. She came running, and we both knew we were right back where we started. She called our neighbor, who came over to help, and with their assistance—and a lot of upper body strength I had built over the years—I managed to get into a wheelchair.

In total, I went through four surgeries—three on my left leg and one on my right. At one point, the surgeon told me my right leg wouldn’t need another surgery because, as he put it, “you need one good leg to stand on.”

That line stuck with me.

For months, I pushed myself, trying to beat this thing, but lying there on the ground after that fall, I realized something had changed. For most of my life, I had been the one helping others.

Now I was the one who needed help.

That’s not an easy adjustment.

Over time, my legs began to improve, but progress was slow. A year of physical therapy took me from casts to a walker, then to braces, and eventually to a cane. Even today, I still rely on that cane for balance—but compared to where I was, it feels like progress. Before all of this—before cancer, before the surgeries—I was physically independent. In the Army, I maxed out fitness tests, jumped out of airplanes, and marched for miles. Now I needed help just to take a shower.

That’s humbling.

There were moments when I felt sorry for myself, but I tried not to stay there long. A quote I had heard years ago kept coming back to me:

“I cried because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet.”

—Helen Keller

Through all of this, Cathy was the steady force behind everything. She cared for me during cancer, and then again through this long recovery—helping me with the most

basic things, waking up at night at the slightest sound, carrying more than anyone should have to carry.

If there were medals for caretakers, she would have earned several.

I can never repay her for what she did.

Those moments brought new meaning to our wedding vows— "*for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health…till death us do part.*"

—words you say without fully understanding until life gives you a reason to.

Life has a way of testing you when you least expect it.

Looking back, I see those moments differently now—the falls, the frustration, the unbearably slow recovery—not just as setbacks, but as part of the path. Each experience shaped my journey.

I found strength not just in myself, but in my family, my faith, and the people who stood beside me.

Through these trials, I found strength not just in myself, but in God and those who stood by me, and I learned that sometimes, failing is just the beginning of finding a good leg to stand on.