

"The heating pad is behind the pickled eggs!"

by Renee M. Priest, CMT

"GEEZZZZ, MOM. Don't look, you guys, don't look. MOM! What are you doing this time!"

And what could I say. There I was, artfully draped over a red rubber chair ball, creatively attempting my best imitation of the "chair corpse pose" (since I no longer have a hard-backed chair upstairs). According to the description, it is an exercise for aching lower backs.

I suppose I should be grateful they did not walk in on my "walking sessions" on the Gazelle. Somehow the mental picture I have of a short, round woman, puffing away, moving those feet back and forth, wearing brightly colored Mouse Mitts, seems like it would cause as much indignation as the lying-over-the-ball exercise!

Certainly I was not given much chance to explain to my daughter's friends that this came from the pages of my treasured copy of "Yoga for Wimps." The exercise book of choice because ... well ... if truth be told, that Pilates CD I bought last year, and the "Fat-burning Yoga" CD that my daughter talked me into buying at the same time, just scared the heck out of me.

Nope, there was no time for explanations because it took that child a big five seconds to look at me, screech, and bolt for her bedroom and the video camera!

Low backache has to be the worst enemy any MT can have. No one can see it. There is no swelling to point to, no big wad of bandages, and inevitably, saying my back hurts is met with "but you sit all day! How can that make your back hurt?" Over the years I have tried acupuncture, massages, more brands of ergonomic "back-friendly" chairs than I ever knew existed, yet on any given day the sheer act of keeping the "tushie" in the chair demonstrates a degree of will power I never knew I was capable of.

Sadly, over the last couple of years, I have had no choice but to learn how to live with the indignant shrieks of mortified teenagers when they make the mistake of walking into my office area unannounced. As my body ages, the slow attrition of sitting for prolonged periods, the cumulative effect of repetitive stress syndrome (carpal tunnel, the grim reaper of the MT world), and a family history of arthritis that has lodged itself in my finger joints are all making themselves felt in some uncomfortably painful ways.

Given the odd assortment of gadgets and gizmos I increasingly find myself accumulating in the search for pain-free productivity and job longevity, I can't really blame my kids for feeling like I have mutated into the MT version of Kevin Costner in the movie *Tin Cup*. Only, instead of wandering around in my boxer shorts with a golf ball dangling in front of my eyes from the latest "\$9.99" contraption sold on late night

TV that is guaranteed to improve my performance, these days I can be found sitting in and on an ever-changing assortment of chairs, lumbar cushions, vibrating massage chair covers, and big red rubber balls that are supposed to be good for your spine but in reality changed the simple act of sitting and using a foot pedal into the equivalent of climbing MT Everest for a decidedly coordination-challenged MT.

There used to be a time when I tried to hide things like the fuchsia Mouse Mitts, or the flannel, fingerless gloves that stretch to my elbows, by whipping them off and tossing them blindly behind the books lining my walls at the first hint of footsteps nearing the doorway. That lasted until the time it took me two days to find my favorite microwavable heating pad after I panicked when a car I did not recognize pulled in my driveway. Two days without a heating pad is sort of like what I imagine two days of sitting on rocks might feel like, and I decided that I just no longer cared how silly I might look if that is what it took to keep at least one part of me comfortable.

My family has a long-standing joke that if you want to know where Mom has been, you only need to follow the trail of reading glasses left behind ... by the clothesline, the garden, in the car. I suppose I should be ashamed to admit this, but I have to have multiple pairs. It is that darned "take them off, set them down, walk away without them" syndrome that I inherited from my mother.

I keep telling my daughter that she needs to stop snickering while we are looking for yet another lost pair because this is most certainly hereditary, but so far she hasn't any signs or symptoms of this familial disease, and she is still smirking each time she overhears "where have my glasses gone now" coming from my office. The day I discovered I could buy reading glasses by the dozen at Sam's was a huge relief! No more working while squinting through a headache and an evening of aching eyes. Just pop open the bottom desk drawer and take out a new pair!

The worst thing about that hereditary loss syndrome, though, is the fact that it migrates. It moved right from the fingers to the wrists and the feet! Feet are pretty darn important to an MT, and misplacing my lamb's wool-lined slippers three times in one winter just about sent me over the edge. Oh, I know, some people swear by slipper socks for keeping the tootsies warm and toasty, but to me, the darn things are just too darn slippery and get caught under the edges of the foot pedal.

Worse than suffering the cold feet, though, is attempting a plausible explanation for exactly why one of my stiff wrist braces ended up on the floor in, as one of my British friends would say, the "loo." Some things were simply not meant to be done wearing those braces, no matter how badly your wrists ache!

Over the years the ever-present arthritic ache has become a companion that just won't go away. Despite the cortisone and the special exercises I do to keep the fingers limber, there are still days when the most wonderful feeling in the world is to plunge those hands into a warm paraffin bath. It is such a feeling of relief that it is tempting to try to prolong it as long as possible. Which explains why I once found myself standing in the grocery store staring at the bewildered look of a cashier as I handed her a \$10 bill from a hand still covered with wax. My children ate many hamburgers paid for by their friends on the strength of the story for several months!

When that heating pad eventually turned up, by the way, it was found to be neatly wedged behind a gallon jar of pickled eggs—garish pink-colored rubbery-looking things that my husband adores. He counts them in the jar to make sure no one else is eating them behind his back, not that I or the kids would touch those things on purpose. I still have not figured out how I could have possibly tossed it that far because the door between the office and pantry area is usually closed.

I would suspect my family of pulling my leg, but they all look so darn innocent.

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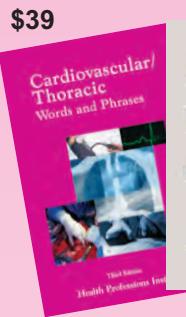
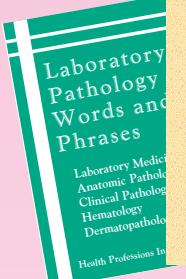
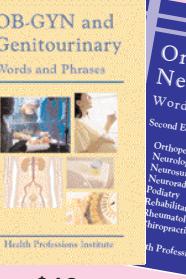
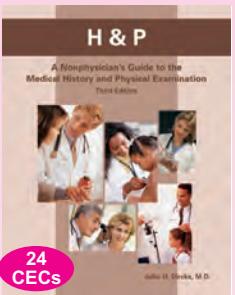
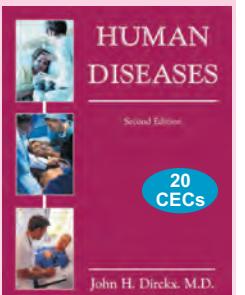
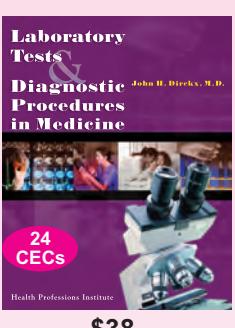
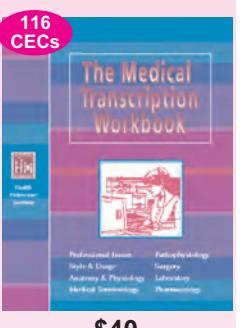
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