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A View from the Kitchen Window: Neighbors and their Ailments.

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My neighbor, who is a talkative character, lives in a gated community, with a gate that can be opened by a code. He often accosts me in the street to tell me his stories. His house has windows that stick out into the street, allowing him to see the passersby while sitting at his kitchen table. He amuses himself by observing his neighbors and their dogs. He confesses he has become a stickybeak, a term from Australia, where he once lived, for an overly inquisitive person. He told me his neighbors are few, but that to his trained eye - he is a retired physician--an amazing variety of ailments unfold daily.

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INTRODUCTION

Two women have 2 small dogs: one black pug and one white poodle. One goes out every day with the dogs safely in a baby carriage for humans. Neither is married. My neighbor is from an earlier generation, when marriage was the norm: He surmises that they are both depressed, and when the depression hits, they go out with the dogs in the baby stroller.

For a time, my neighbor watched a man with Parkinsonism as he tried on Mondays when the garbage and recycle bins are emptied to drag the empty bins to the back of the house where they are normally parked. After some weeks he gave up. Now his wife, who is pencil thin, does this job and retrieves the mail. She is pencil thin and obviously anorexic.

An elderly neighbor, a veteran from the Army judging by his cap which he dons every day, walks with a metal stick because of his limp, which he developed not long ago (not during war), and which is getting worse. His children are chronic exercisers. They cycle past every morning. They are obviously very fit.

A woman and her dog, named Sydney (an Australian shepherd), appear regularly twice a day, morning and night. The woman was Canadian Olympic team physician at the Sydney Olympics in 2000.

Another woman with hair recently died purple walks like a sergeant major instructing his troops: shoulders back, one two three, one two three.

There is also a fat lady who is pulled by a little dog; she walks reading a book at the same time.

Two teenage albino kids run up and down the relatively mild hills outside my neighbor's window. They are not impressive athletes. But they provide amusement while they are at it.

Age has its moments too: Two elderly men walk past; one has a partially frozen left knee which causes a limp, otherwise he is fine.

A young female dog walker, a teenager, supervises three little dogs. She is elaborately tattooed in red and black on her face, arms and chest. My neighbor finds her tattoos distasteful.

A very tall man is married to a Chinese woman who looks 10 years younger than he is and barely reaches his shoulder. He is morbidly obese; he walks behind his belly, so to speak. The belly seems to drag him along, as does their well-trained Belgian water dog.

An old man, slightly bowlegged, is ataxic, but he stops the few people he encounters and talks continuously. He does not use a cane!

My neighbor himself is part of the show. He is a very old man; in his late nineties I would guess. I dread to meet him because I cannot stop him from talking about his extensive medical health record.

As a child he said he had a right ear infection at age 8 that was treated by chiseling out his infected mastoid bone. He still remembers the surgeon's name, perhaps because he dreaded the daily trips to the surgeon's office in which a piece of gauze was inserted into the wound behind his right ear to facilitate drainage of the pus. This office procedure was extremely painful. His uncle, however, was a chemical engineer who worked for Wander, a Swiss drug and food company still in existence. In 1936 Prontosil, the first sulfonamide antibiotic, became available from Wander, and after 2 doses the pus ceased flowing, and he remained free of pain thereafter.

As a young man he emigrated from Europe to Australia. It soon became obvious that he had muscle weakness. He no longer could walk upstairs without help. He recalls his doctors diagnosed a myopathy and recognized it was caused by a parathyroid adenoma; the tumor was removed, and he became a normal young man again. However, he recollects he had an episode of carpo-pedal spasm which in retrospect was due to the sudden fall in calcium levels in his blood when his adenoma was removed. It was treated by an intravenous injection of calcium.

He later became an ultrarunner and still rows at least 8000 meters every second day on a Concept 2 rowing machine and walks on a treadmill. 200 paces but not long ago he found himself face down in the gravel of his house's driveway. He had fainted. He was unhurt but could not get up without his son's help. It was night, and his wife kept watch over him because they expected visitors. She worried they would turn into the driveway and hit him.

Unfortunately, the parathyroid disease had left its mark, and he was told that he now had developed aortic stenosis (tightening of the opening of the aortic valve of the heart). A metal aortic valve was inserted through a catheter into his heart, in a procedure known as a TAVR (trans arterial valve replacement) He was also told the procedure would destroy his heart's natural pacemaker, and he soon received a battery-powered artificial pacemaker to stabilize his heartbeat.

I couldn't stop him from talking; he also told me his wife had recently died. Increasingly he remains indoors, watching the sights. A woman "dog walker" walks 2 little dogs. She walks with great difficulty and has severe kyphosis. A man with kyphosis also walks his 2 dogs. Although he is elderly he walks leaning forward, like a tank in a hurry.

Not all the views are bleak. Occasionally a pregnant woman walks by, being "pulled" by a very large dog. Or one runner or sometimes several runners, obviously very fit, pass by. He enjoys seeing roadrunner birds, which are plentiful in his neighborhood. Also, Red-throated thrush birds are courting in the upper window of his exercise room.

Now the Copper Globemallow or Narrow leaf Globemallow, a small red flower, is out amongst the rocks on the road opposite his window, and the white winged doves, plentiful in the neighborhood, sit on lampposts or forage on the ground.

When it snows and it is very cold, the woman and her little dog are both heavily bundled and fortified against the cold.

A man with a burn scar on his right leg walks with his young son and wife, this time without the predatory black cat that usually slinks alongside, so the roadrunners are safe.

The cotton is flying on the wind; these are seeds of the *cotton wood* tree hoping to find a foothold somewhere to eventually produce a new tree. The rosemary bush is in flower, and the bees are busy.

The woman with the very long hair and her dog number 2 (the same looking animal as number 1 was) is walking in her scrubs and plastic flip-flops. A weather warning is in effect.

And in my neighbor's indoor perch a delightful silence reigns.

CONCLUSION.

The view from a kitchen window offers a great variety of illnesses which to the trained eye offers a spectacle that is amusing to behold and delightful to watch.

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