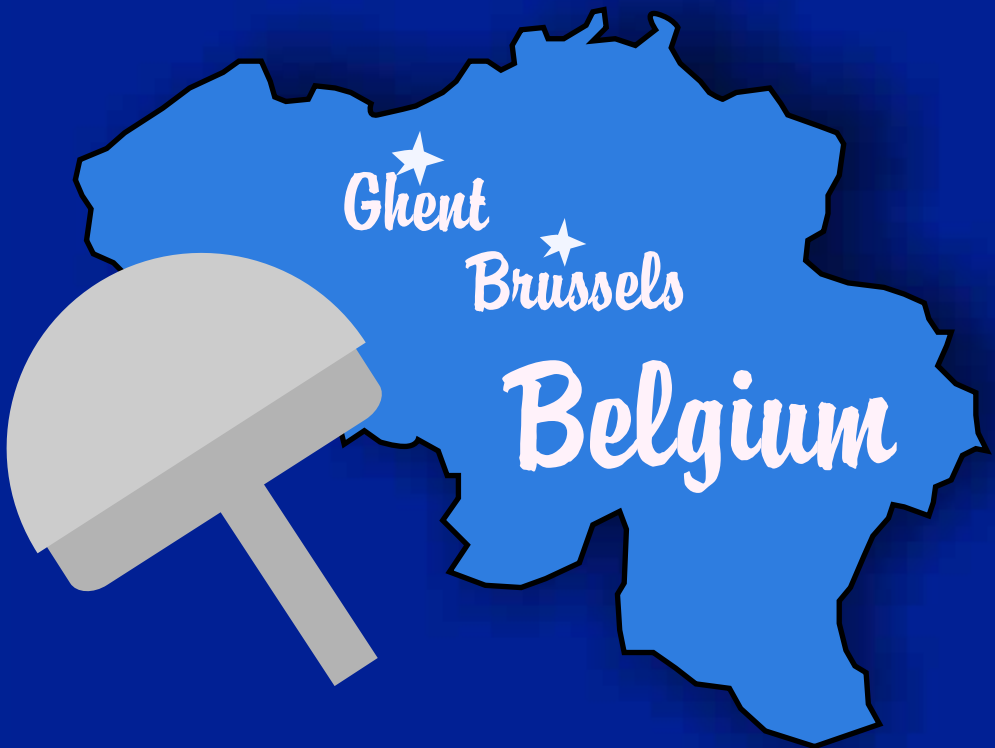


Belgium and My BHR

A Story About Hip Resurfacing



By Patricia Walter

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Introduction

Not every American has the opportunity to use one of the best hip surgeons in the world – especially a poor middle class American without health insurance. At the age of sixty-one, deep in debt and without a job, I was able to have a hip replacement by Dr. Koen De Smet of Belgium. Not only did I have a hip replacement, but received a Birmingham Hip Resurfacing called a BHR.

A BHR is one of the most modern hip prostheses available worldwide. It was approved in the United States by the FDA on May 9, 2006. Hip Surgeons world wide have been using the BHR since 1989. What makes a BHR so modern and wonderful? It is currently the gold standard, accepted “state of the art” hip prosthesis in Canada, Europe and Australia. A normal total hip replacement, called a THR, used in the US is an old-fashioned plastic/metal ball prosthesis. The top of your femur bone must be sawed off and a long hole is drilled into the remaining femur bone. The long spike of the femur portion of the hip prosthesis is then pounded down into the hollowed out canal. The top of the femur bone is not removed when a BHR is installed. The ball of the femur is reshaped to accept the cap portion of the BHR. A small hole is drilled into the ball to accept the pin of the femur cap. The cap then provides protection for the top of the femur bone that has been worn out. Since it is providing a new surface for the bone, it is called a resurfacing. An acetabular cup is also placed into the pelvis bone to provide a bearing surface for the cap on the femur. This cup is similar to the ones used for THR’s. In fact, if there is ever a problem with a BHR, it can be revised into a THR by replacing the portion of the femur cup with a normal THR prosthesis. The acetabular cup can remain in place.



Birmingham Hip Replacement

I feel very lucky to have learned about hip resurfacing and been able to find enough money left on our credit cards to fly to Belgium to have my hip resurfaced. I simply could not afford surgery in the United States. This is my story about my new BHR that I received in Belgium in March of 2006.



Pat and Dr. De Smet March 23, 2006

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Why a BHR?

I had pain in my hip for almost 10 years. My old orthopedic surgeon wanted to give me a nice new hip “that would last for twenty-five years” back in 1995. I was only fifty one then and felt I was way too young to receive a hip replacement. I had a cortisone shot placed in the hip capsule, massage therapy and made many visits to the chiropractor. I also took a variety of pain killers. Everything helped in the beginning but slowly did less and less to stop pain over the years. In the last few years before my surgery, I was very inactive. I walked very little and finally was unable to ride my bicycle.

I was tired of sitting around in a chair all day and watching TV. Life was passing me by. I feel I even sank into somewhat of a depression. I stopped doing almost everything I had loved in my life – painting, writing, playing music and any kind of sports activity. My life had come to a stand still.

One night while my husband and I were at our local tavern, I met a man who told us about his life as a deep sea diver in the North Sea in the 70’s. He was very interesting and told how the nitrogen from the many dives had settled into his right hip. It had caused him great pain and he finally had a hip resurfacing. I did not completely understand his story about how he had his hip repaired and was commenting on how terribly I thought the current modern medical treatment for a hip replacement was. I continued to remark about why in the world the doctors had to saw off your bones and “slice and dice” you in such a drastic manner to replace a hip. I felt that our current technology should be able to replace worn cartilage in some manner instead of just removing the whole hip. We are living in the twenty-first century and men have traveled to the moon, yet

surgeons use fancy versions of woodworking saws and drills to replace an old hip. He looked at me and said “They don’t have to saw your bone off any more, they just resurface it.” I looked at him in amazement and said “Really?” He told me he had traveled to CA to have his hip resurfaced in July of 2005 with Dr. Harlan Amstutz of the **Joint Replacement Institute** in Los Angeles. I was amazed and could hardly believe my ears. Was his story really true? Sometimes when you are at your favorite local tavern enjoying a drink or two, stories can get to be more fiction than fact. He told me about some discussion group called the “surface hippies.”

As soon as we got home, my husband did a search on the internet and found a link to the Yahoo Discussion Group called **Surfacehippy · Hip Resurfacing Patients and Friends**. I immediately joined the group and started to read all the posts. This was a very large group of more than forty-two hundred members as of March 2006. I was amazed at what I read. All the stories about people that had their hips resurfaced by doctors in the US and abroad. Stories about their recoveries, their problems and their concerns for each other. It opened a door to a world of people that I never knew existed. I kept reading and I kept learning.

Meanwhile, I had appointments with three orthopedic surgeons in Ohio. One surgeon actually knew what the current modern hip resurfacing was, but said he would not recommend it to me since I was too old. Two other surgeons really did not know much about the hip resurfacing that was being used world wide and would not even discuss it with me. The BHR has been used since 1989 and more than 65,000 people have them. Of course, the FDA had not approved it for use in the US and few orthopedic doctors seemed to be keeping up with the trend

in the rest of the world. In Canada, Europe and Australia, the BHR is normally offered to younger, active people instead of a THR. There were doctors performing hip resurfacing procedures for studies for the FDA in the US, but very few orthopedic surgeons seemed to know much about it according to my experience and the stories from hundreds of other “hippies” writing on the discussion group.

The typical responses from orthopedics were:

- I. You will be sorry
- II. It’s old-fashioned technology
- III. It has already come and gone
- IV. The metal ions will harm you
- V. It has no track record
- VI. It won’t last

But from my reading, more than 65,000 people worldwide were not sorry that they had BHRs. It was the most modern, cutting edge technology currently available. There had been other forms of resurfacing that did fail in the past. Hemi-resurfacing was popular at one time. A cap was placed on the femur bone to protect it, but nothing was placed in the acetabular socket. So the result was metal on bone which did not last long and became very painful. There is a long history of different types of hip prostheses – some very successful and still used, while others were not reliable.

The most impressive evidence of the successful use of BHRs around the world was the wonderful record kept by the other countries. They have different health systems and require that hip operations and their outcomes be recorded. There are many studies available to the public to examine the records of many BHR implants world wide. The records

seemed to be very good to me. On the average, about one and one half percent of the implanted BHRs required revisions resulting from femoral neck fractures, infections and loose components. A very good track record as compared to the number of revisions required for THRs in our country.

Armed with all this information and daily input from hundreds of hippies that had just received hip resurfacings or were about to, I made up my mind that I, too, wanted a hip resurfacing, not a THR. I wanted to remain active and return to the activities of tennis and biking that I loved. I wanted to be able to do gardening again and get on the floor with all our dogs. I did not want an old-fashioned hip and act like an old lady sitting around. I did not care about what was said by the FDA or by most of the orthopedic surgeons who were very ill-informed about what was currently used in the rest of the world.

I emailed Dr. De Smet my x-rays in digital format and he quickly answered with an evaluation of my hip problem. He explained to me that I was still an excellent candidate for hip resurfacing with a BHR. I also sent my x-rays to Dr. Bose in India and Dr. Gross in South Carolina. I wanted to get several opinions. I simply could not afford surgery in the United States and did not want to take the very long flight to India. So I choose to go to Belgium and have my hip resurfacing with Dr. De Smet. I found we had enough credit left on our credit cards to be able to have my hip resurfaced in Belgium. We spent about \$16,000 for all the medical services, plane tickets, lodging and food.

I am thankful that our world has become connected by the internet. It is a wonderful tool to learn about any subject matter you want to research. It is also, almost magic, to think you can talk to people all over the world via email. I

have talked with so many people in many different countries that have had hip resurfacings. I learned from their surgeries and experiences. The discussion groups are, also, wonderful places to talk with people and share concerns about your health problems. Support and help are only a few keystrokes away.

It is also amazing to think you can talk directly with an orthopedic doctor like Dr. De Smet via email. You can send your x-rays in a digital format and have a very quick consultation. You can then schedule your surgery, hospital arrangements, hotel and airline tickets by the internet. The computer connects the world. I made all my surgery arrangements via internet – then hopped on a plane, flew to Belgium and checked into the hospital for surgery, all without ever talking to a real person before my arrival in Belgium. The world has changed and we should be grateful for the open communications that are available to us.

I felt like I already knew Dr. De Smet before I arrived in Belgium. I had read so many stories about other De Smet patients and looked at all their wonderful photos that I lived the experience in my mind before I ever left. I was very excited about having surgery in Belgium and made all the preparations for the trip. Only a passport is required to travel to Belgium. The currencies used in Belgium are Euros.

I had made my decision to have a hip resurfacing and receive a beautiful, brand-new BHR from Dr. De Smet. Life was going to be good once again.

Why I Choose Dr. De Smet

There were a number of reasons that I choose Dr. De Smet as my doctor. I had been studying and reading about hip replacement. I learned a great deal from the Surface Hippy Yahoo Discussion group, but also read everything I could find on the internet.

I spent a lot of time reading all of the information about many of the surgeons that were mentioned by the Discussion Group. Most of the doctors have websites or at least have a web page about themselves. I read all of the Frequently Asked Questions pages, pages about their surgical techniques, pre op and post op procedures, possible complications, and stories about patients that had hip resurfacing. I was very interested in the stories telling how active these patients were and how they could do any activities that they wanted.

I did many internet searches and found a very large amount of information about hip replacement and hip resurfacing. I would read and read until my eyes would get blurry.

I learned quickly that our local surgeons were very old-fashioned and behind times in their knowledge about hip replacement. Some of them did not even offer any of the newer type of hips like the Metal on Metal, large ball hip replacement. They were still using the small diameter plastic/metal hips from years ago. The local surgeons warned me that I could not even mow the lawn if it was uneven due to the possibility of a dislocation of the old-fashioned hip. I knew that I could not learn anything from the local medical community.

I have always felt that experience is earned, not learned. People have to work very hard to become experienced and

need great dedication. Usually they are very single minded in what they are trying to perfect, it is their life. I don't think there is any other way that the great athletes, artists, musicians, dancers, etc. of the world have ever become so great except by dedication. Any time I tried to learn something, it always took a lot of time and repetition. You worked at it until it became second nature to you. You did not have to think about every move, you instinctively knew what to do. That is the kind of surgeon that I wanted to be operating on my hip. I know that I only have two hips and need them both to work correctly to walk properly. Surgery is always a risk and I felt I wanted the best surgeon that I could find to give me a new hip.

I had realized from reading that older ladies, in their sixties, were more susceptible to femur neck fractures. I learned that it is usually the result of postmenopausal effects on the body. Older ladies begin to lose bone density faster than older men. Therefore, older women have a slightly higher risk needing a revision after a hip resurfacing.

Knowing that I had a higher risk of problems, I wanted one of the best surgeons in the world to be operating on me. I wanted to know in my mind that if something went wrong, I could live with it. I would not always be second guessing myself or feeling guilty that I did not choose a good surgeon. I did not want to be thinking "If only I had chosen one of the best, I would have been OK." I was willing to accept a problem if it happened, but knew the odds of surgical problems would be reduced by using a very good doctor.

Dr. De Smet had performed over two-thousand hip resurfacings and over three-thousand total hip replacements. He was one of the most experienced hip surgeons in the world. His record was very impressive. He

actually had his record of surgeries posted on his website. In fact, it is easy to find out about any surgeon's record in Canada, Australia and Europe since they have national records available to the public. Unfortunately, there is not such a public record in the US and you can only find out about a doctor's record by asking him. It seemed to me that many doctors don't like to be asked such questions.

I felt Dr. De Smet was the doctor for me. I could afford his surgery, or at least I had enough credit left on my credit cards to pay for the surgery. He was very easy to talk with via email and he had answered all my questions quickly and fully. He was very different from the US doctors that would only spend a few minutes with me. I knew that he had a great surgery record and a great deal of experience. My mind would be at ease to have Dr. De Smet perform my hip resurfacing.

The Trip to Belgium

March 11 Saturday

I gave each dog a little kiss on the head, a hug and a whispered message that I would be back soon. – I repeated that for each dog, sixteen times for all sixteen dogs. They were now in the care of my friend and neighbor, Jeanie.

We joined the suitcases which had already been packed in the car and headed from Marietta, OH to Charleston, WV. I had not flown on a plane since 1974. I expected things to be quite different and had never been thru the post 911 airport security. We had been told what to expect. The Charleston Airport was very friendly since it was a smaller, rural airport. We had no problems going thru security and waited several hours for our plane. The airlines always suggest you arrive two hours early for flights, so we had a two-hour wait since the airport was so small. It gave me time to call my Mom and report on our progress.



Ted and Pat at the Charleston, WV airport

The flight was on a small prop-plane and rather bumpy. The day was sunny and the view from the window was very pretty as the foothills of the Appalachians shone

below us. The touch down was a bit bumpy, but we survived. I had taken nausea medicine prescribed by my doctor since I become airsick very easily. Ted had taken it too, but he wasn't sure that it was working as the plane bumped around. We both managed to keep from using the air sick bags.

Washington, D.C. was a real shock. It was a huge airport. Everything seemed to be under construction and every building miles from any other building. The buses ran around the airport crossing in front of baggage caring carts and right by the large jet planes parked at the gates. I had my first wheelchair ride since my hip was hurting and I knew I would never be able to walk the whole airport. Ted was walking so slowly that the wheelchair pusher asked if he needed a wheelchair too. The wheelchair pushers are young and race around the airport like they are in a marathon. We arrived at the security area and were quickly processed. Again, we had an hour wait. I called my Mom one more time to tell her she would not hear from me for at least another nine hours.

Finally it was time to board the large 647 jet. I was amazed how many people they could squeeze into the Economy Class section. I felt like I was in the Sardine Section. I could quickly understand why so many hippies before me flew Business or First Class. The flight was very smooth, but very long. We were served a snack soon after take off and then a nice dinner. We had left about 5:30 p.m.. After dinner, the lights were turned down and everyone seemed relaxed and slept. I was somewhat uncomfortable since the seats felt narrow to me and I felt very confined. I did get up and take a couple trips to the restroom. That was certainly Sardine Class too. I didn't think you could put toilet facilities in such a small space. I really became very tired and was ready to get off the plane after six hours. So I took

another walk toward the back and stretched my legs again. Breakfast was then served and we were landing before I knew it. I never like landings, but we made a safe, smooth landing.

The Brussels Airport seemed huge to me. I did not see a wheelchair assistant and decided to walk from the plane to the baggage area. Fortunately I had a cane with me since it was a very long walk on the people movers. It seemed we had walked for miles. We finally found our luggage and Ted stacked it on a cart. We realized we had taken too much already. The airline said we were allowed two large bags each, so we took two large bags each. We left part of the bags empty so we would have room to take Belgium Chocolate and other goodies home for our friends.

We were looking for our cab driver that was supposed to meet us. Yes, there he was holding up a big sign saying “Patricia Walter.” We felt a little relief finding someone that would know how to get us to the Holiday Inn in Ghent. We quickly realized that we were hearing all kinds of languages and little English. We had never traveled outside of the US before. Our cab driver was very nice and a little concerned about our four large suitcases. He had a small Citron car. After much work, he managed to get two of the suitcases into the trunk and pile two more next to Ted in the back seat.

We had our first glimpses of Belgium. It really could have been Columbus, OH since it looked similar and was flat, but all the signs were in Dutch. All of the cars were small and many of the houses had tile roofs. We arrived at the Holiday Inn with no problem and had a nice visit with the cab driver during the ride. He spoke fair English.

We were allowed to check into the Holiday Inn even though it was only 9am. Our plane had landed about 7:30 a.m.. We had lost six hours during the flight, now that we were on Belgium time. We were really tired after the eight and one-half hour flight.

Our room looked like a normal US motel room. Perhaps more like a room from ten years ago. The windows still opened and the sheets were ironed. We collapsed on our beds and took naps.

Our First Days in Ghent

Sunday March 12

We thought we should do a little sight seeing since it was only about noon when we woke up from our naps. We still had all of Sunday ahead of us. The desk clerks at the Holiday Inn all spoke good English. It seems there are so many countries bordering on Belgium and so many different languages that English is the common language spoken. That was fortunate for us. The nice girls at the desk suggested that we visit their historic area of Ghent and ordered us a cab. This was Sunday and the weekend cab drivers are much more wild in their driving than the weekday drivers. Maybe it is because they are part time drivers. Zero to fifty miles per hour in two seconds was the normal mode of acceleration while trying to hit every pedestrian or bicyclist. There are hundreds of bicyclists in Ghent. If a car is moving too slowly, the cab would push on his bumper to move him along, or it seemed that way. We arrived downtown safely and were happy to become walking tourists.



Pat and Ted in Ghent



First views of Ghent



The old buildings



The wonderful fountains

Ghent was an absolutely beautiful town. I had never seen buildings that were hundreds of years old. The architecture

was astoundingly beautiful. The fountains were stunning even on a very cold, windy day. The cathedrals were breathtaking. I took more than six hundred photos while I was in Belgium. I had purchased a new digital camera just for the trip and was very happy that I had it with me.



Pat and Victor the French Bulldog



Het Lamb Gods Restaurant

We had a wonderful afternoon in the very cold, windy, chilly weather. My first memory of Belgium will always be going into the restaurant called Het Lamb Gods. This was the home of Victor, the French Bulldog. He was the restaurant owner's dog and sat at the rear table on his own little cushion and greeted customers. I love dogs, so I knew this was going to be a great place to eat. What a place Ghent was turning out to be - dogs allowed to accompany

you into a restaurant to eat. Fantastic. Now I am wishing I had brought my sixteen with me. We could have taken up the whole little restaurant.

The waitress did not speak much English and the menu was in Dutch. We asked for hot chocolate assuming that would be easy for her to understand. Then we glanced at the table next to us to see the folks eating yummy looking crepes with ice cream. We pointed to their plates and asked for the same.

The hot chocolate was to die for! They served you a cup of hot milk with a large square of semi-sweet chocolate on a stick that you were to place into the hot milk. The chocolate was fantastic. Tasting the hot melting chocolate with my spoon almost brought tears to my eyes because it was so delicious. I love chocolate. I had never had hot chocolate served that way. Of course in Belgium, you are never just served a plain cup of anything. In the states, the waitress usually plops down a naked cup without a saucer or much of anything else. In Belgium, everything is served with extra goodies and is so much fun to eat. Every snack becomes a little ceremony of life. There were little wrapped cookies with chocolate frosting plus little chocolate eggs. There is always a spoon and often a cloth napkin. Having tea, coffee or hot chocolate in Belgium is always special.



We continued to walk the streets, stare at the beautiful buildings and take a lot of photos. There was a photo opportunity everywhere you looked, beautiful cathedrals and cobblestone streets. It was a crisp, cold Belgium Sunday and many people were out walking, talking and having fun. I will never forget those first memories of Belgium.

We returned to the Holiday Inn later and decided to sit in the lounge to enjoy a Belgium beer. We soon met other hippies. Every person you see on a crutch is most likely a Dr. De Smet patient since all of his patients stayed at the Holiday Inn. We met Nancy from California who was helping a friend that recently had a total hip replacement with Dr. De Smet. Most of his patients were having hip resurfacings, but this lady had injured her hip when her horse fell on her. So she needed some serious and difficult surgery to her hip. Nancy was fun loving and great company. Soon, Margareta and Goran also arrived. Margareta had her surgery the week before and was already walking with one crutch. The three had already been friends since they had been staying together at the Holiday Inn since the week before. They were planning a trip to historic Ghent on Monday and we asked if we could join them. Of course they said, yes, and we planned to take a canal boat trip that toured thru all the very old historic buildings.

Monday March 13

It was slightly warmer on Monday since the sun was shining. Again, the scenery and buildings were mind boggling to me since I had never traveled in Europe before. The camera got a good workout again. We had a wonderful day and also took everyone back to visit Victor and had the fantastic hot chocolate one more time. Everyone was so

surprised and pleased with the restaurant and the hot chocolate. We spent the afternoon on an open canal boat viewing the historic old buildings and listening to the many stories of the guilds and history presented by the canal boat guide.



Canal Boat and bridge across the canal

The sun felt warm on our faces and everything in Belgium was beautiful. The tour gang wanted to visit the local castle, but Margareta and I were too tired to walk that far. Also the crew wanted to climb to the top of the castle to take in the view of the city of Ghent. So we stayed behind and went into the Café Leffe. Margareta had a beautiful cappuccino and I had ice cream with chocolate sauce. Of course in Belgium, nothing is served as plain ice cream with chocolate sauce. It is a beautiful presentation with whipped cream, and thin chocolate slices accompanied with cookies and chocolate candy. The presentation of food is wonderful in Belgium. I have never traveled or visited any other European countries, but assume it is similar all over Europe. I loved the beautiful little presentations. Every little cup of something was like a little ceremony with all the extra goodies. We enjoyed our snack and the tired castle crew finally showed up. They had climbed many steps to see the view of Ghent from the castle towers.



Nancy and Margareta & Goran



The Castle and Peach Melba at the Café Leffe



View of Ghent from the Castle

They said it was well worth the climb, but my bad hip prevented me from such activities. We made one more stop at a Belgium Chocolate shop to make sure we had a supply of chocolate for our rooms. The chocolate in Belgium is to die for and you never want to be without a good supply. I guess that could also be said of the wonderful varieties of Belgium beer, too. We ended our wonderful day in the lounge of the Holiday Inn tasting the many beers of Belgium and enjoying conversation with our new friends.

March 14 Tuesday

D-day, or I should say H-day. The day I was to check into Jan Pafijn Hospital. Our new friends decided to accompany us part way to the hospital and have lunch with us. I was very flattered that they would take time from their day to join me. Nancy also wanted to show Ted what buses and trams to take from the Holiday Inn to the hospital so that he would not get lost. Nancy was a very nice person and extremely helpful. We really appreciated all her time and effort.



Ted, Pat, Margareta & Goran

We all had lunch at a vegetarian restaurant. We did not realize it was vegetarian until we were seated, but certainly did not mind. We had delicious vegetable soup, breads and tea. It was a very nice “last supper” for my old hip. It would never get to experience another lunch again since it was about to be replaced. We said our goodbyes and Nancy escorted us to the front door of the Jan Palfijn Hospital.

Jan Palfijn Hospital



The Jan Palfijn Hospital looks like any other American hospital that I have seen. Fortunately, my hospital experience has been limited to a few hospitals in Ohio. It appeared clean and normal except that all the signs were in Dutch. Check in is a very simple matter in Belgium. In the US, it seems there are always mountains of paper work to fill out and many hospital associates to talk to. I just walked up to the nice lady and said I would like to check in. She was able to speak some English, but was somewhat limited in her conversational skills. I thought to myself, I don't believe I am doing this. Sitting in front of a Dutch lady speaking bits of English and staring at papers which don't mean a thing to me since they were all in Dutch. I knew why I was there and decided to have faith and continue with my registration. I had known many other hippies had gone before me and their outcomes were great. So I signed my name one time at the place she pointed to. To this day, I have no idea what I signed, but I do have a copy of the papers. It only took my signature on one piece of paper to be admitted. Of course, I did have to hand her my credit card to make the full payment of six thousand Euros to cover my hospital stay and all the medical expenses. She did not need to know English to swipe the card and take the payment. It was painless and I signed my name just one more time to the credit card form. That was it – I was a

patient at the Jan Palfjin Hospital. Two signatures and I was admitted. I am sure many Americans would appreciate such a quick admission to US hospitals. I understand their legal system is quite different from ours. You accept the outcome of your doctor's skill and have very little recourse in suing over medical mistakes. I knew Dr. De Smet had already successfully operated on more than two thousand hip resurfacing patients and more than three thousand total hip replacement patients. So I felt his record of successes would be my insurance to a great new BHR and a fast recovery.

I was assigned a room and managed to find it after a few false starts. Again, the signs are in Dutch and not always easy to figure out. My room was a double and looked like a typical hospital room. Maybe, a bit more like a room in an American hospital from 10 years ago. But it was clean and even the sheets were ironed along with the surgical gown. That was a nice surprise. I assume Belgians like ironed sheets since the sheets at the Holiday Inn were also ironed. It took me back to the old days when we use to iron everything. It makes you feel important to lie on ironed sheets. After all, it does take time to iron them. I can still remember ironing everything in the laundry basket when I grew up in the 50's. I felt like I was in a time warp.

We actually had a TV with, I assume, cable service. But it was in black and white, and the only languages I heard were either Dutch or French. Quite interesting to watch old US reruns dubbed in Dutch or French.

I met my nice roommate, Ineke, a fifty-one-year-old young lady from Holland that was a dentist. She was very interesting and had a good English vocabulary. There are so many languages spoken in Belgium and the nearby

countries that English seems to be the common denominator for everyone.



Pat and her roommate Ineke

We were told that it was time to go for our pretesting. We arrived outside the x-ray room, took a seat and waited our turns. Then we meet another couple from Greece. Olga was to have her left hip resurfaced, too. So now there were three of us gals all waiting anxiously to have our left hips resurfaced by Dr. De Smet. Of course we all got into a conversation immediately and became instant friends. We all faced surgery the next day and were all nervous about it.

The nurse had already taken blood from both of my arms upstairs before we left for our other tests. For some reason, she took blood from both arms and explained that it was Belgium law that she takes blood from both of my arms since I was an American. My roommate who was from Holland, only had to give blood from one arm. I guess you just have to watch us Americans, you never know that we could change blood types from one side of our bodies to the other. I really didn't understand it all, but did not feel it was important. She was very good and did not hurt me in either arm when she withdrew the blood. So I forgot about it.

Then we each had our hips x-rayed. The x-ray machine was very interesting. There was a table that stood vertical with a step at the bottom and you were to stand up against it. Then it began to rotate you backwards until you were laying flat on your back. They took a series of x-rays and tilted you back up to a standing position. I imagine it was easier that way than trying to climb on and off the tables like I have used in the US. I did not know at that time that I was to visit this table one more time before I left the hospital.

Next we had electro cardio grams. That was simple but their electrodes really stung a little bit. Maybe because they had old-fashioned electrodes that pinched on. It was over quickly and really not a problem. The other gals talked with the heart doctor and were on their way back to their rooms. But when I had my consultation, he told me that he found I had a heart murmur. I had made sure I had a blood test and EKG before I went to Belgium. I did not want to pay for a flight over there to be told I was not in good health and could not have my hip surgery. So I was a little surprised when he told me about the heart murmur. He said it did not present a problem for my upcoming surgery, but that I should have a heart echogram when I got home to check it out. I was a little unhappy with that and explained that we did not have health insurance. I told him that was why I was in Belgium to receive my new hip, it cost much less here than in the US. He told me a heart echogram would probably cost me about nine hundred dollars in the US. I thought to myself that it would probably be more than that by the time I paid a doctor for the first examination to get a prescription for the test. He could see that I was concerned and said “we will do it for fifty dollars.” Now that was music to my ears. I said fine, that I would really appreciate having the test done here.

So the young, handsome heart doctor performed the heart echogram. After he did his initial testing, he took time to swing the monitor around to me and point out my aortic valve that was starting to calcify. He told me not to worry and that people my age often start having this type of problem. He said that I should not have any significant problems with the valve for another twenty years. I said that is great since I wanted to make sure I would have plenty of time left to enjoy my new hip.

Having received good news about my heart murmur, I was happy to meet up with my husband and tell him all the good news. Then we found our way back to my room by reading some Dutch signs and getting a little first hand help from hospital staff.

It was time to start settling in and getting use to my Belgium hospital room. What better way to be welcomed than having dinner served! Hospital food in Belgium is much different than in the US. Dinner was four plain slices of hearty bread, several slices of what looked like Bologna with canned pineapple on top of it and black coffee. I wasn't very hungry, but Ted was starving. He put those plain slices of lunch meat in-between the bread and ate a feast. You don't worry about condiments in Belgium, I guess you are just supposed to enjoy the full-bodied flavor of whatever you place in-between the bread. I found out the plain hearty bread was a staple in Belgium along with a normal assortment of cheeses and lunch meats. The hospital breakfast and dinners were all the same – bread and lunch meats. I only had one lunch after surgery and it was a fancier hot meal, but was so groggy that I can't remember anything but the mashed potatoes.



Dinner at the hospital.

Dr. De Smet arrived after dinner. It was a thrill to finally meet him. I had talked with him via email for several months and had heard so much about him from the Yahoo Discussion Group, but finally meeting him in person was almost unbelievable. He was very nice and willing to answer any questions. I did not have many since I had asked every conceivable question I could think of prior to my trip to Belgium. I thanked him and told him that I could not wait to get my new hip. I found out I was to be the first in surgery on Wednesday morning. I had a 7:30 a.m. appointment to receive my new hip. He thought since I was from another country and the oldest patient that I should go first to allow me the longest time to recover. I was happy to be first on the agenda since I would not have any time in the morning to worry about surgery.

After he left, Ted and I felt like something more to eat. So we found our way to the hospital cafeteria. Of course we found it was true that the cafeteria did serve beer. Belgium is quite different from the US – you can buy and drink beer everywhere – the hospital and even McDonalds. Unfortunately it was just closing, but the nice lady let us buy some ice cream that we took back to the room.

This was quite a day in my life - checking into a foreign hospital and waiting to get a new state-of-art hip from a doctor that I had just met. Of course, I knew that Dr. De Smet was one of the best hip surgeons in the world and that had always put my mind at ease. I also knew he had done more than two thousand hip resurfacings and only had one revision from a femur head fracture. I loved his fantastic record and could not wait to be another one of his successful statistics.

Ted decided that he better make his way back to the Holiday Inn while the busses were still running. I kissed him good-bye and told him that I would see him first thing in the morning.

Olga, my new friend from Greece, and Ineke, my roommate, and I decided we would get together and chat for a while. We were all nervous and anxious about tomorrow's surgeries. We gathered in Olga's room where her roommate just had back surgery. She was a middle-aged woman that did not speak English. We were afraid that our chattering would bother her, but she smiled and explained to Ineke in Dutch, that she was happy to have a little happy talk in the room. She did not mind our enthusiasm and chattering.

Finally we decided it was time to try to get some sleep. I watched the foreign TV for a while and talked with Ineke. I took my sleeping pill about 10pm and don't remember much at all after that. Medicine really makes me sleepy and goofy. I can take a sinus pill and be hung over the next day. So I am really easy to put out. I can barely remember seeing Ted the next morning about 7am. After that I can't remember a thing until long after my surgery when I woke up with the worst thirst that I could ever remember in my whole life.

Post Op at Jan Palfijn

I don't remember anything about the day of surgery or much of what happened immediately after I was in the recovery room. The Belgian hospital was a little different from our US hospitals. Normally the US hospitals seem to get you back to your room pretty quickly after surgery, but in Jan Palfijn, they hold you in the recovery room much longer. I was scheduled for 7:30 a.m. surgery. Ted arrived about 7a.m. to help me get into my surgical gown and say "Good Luck." The nurse was immediately irritated that he was there so early before posted visiting hours. The doctor had told him he could come to see me in the morning, but that made little difference to the nurse in charge. But he was allowed to stay and see me off to my hip surgery date with Dr. De Smet.

I had taken a sleeping pill the night before and I think it was still working the next day. Many medications seem to make me very sleepy and last much longer in my system than the label indicates they should. So I just don't remember much about the surgery preparations. I don't even remember Ted helping me into my surgical gown. I guess I lay down in bed and they rolled me away. I have almost no memory of that morning.

I have been told by some people that they woke up quickly after surgery and felt pain. If I did wake up or had pain, I don't remember it at all. My first memory after surgery was a thirst like I never experienced in my life before. I think the morphine plus the tube they put down your throat for breathing made me very, very thirsty. I thought I would choke with every breath I took or every time I tried to swallow. I saw two of the most beautiful large glass bottles of water sitting on my bed tray. What a welcome sight. I managed to drink one whole bottle during the first day.

Every time I woke up, I would pour a glass of water and drink to quench my terrible thirst. I don't think a person stuck in the middle of a desert could have been thirstier than I was.



Belgium water in glass bottles

Everything seemed to go fine. My husband said that I spent most of my time sleeping and snoring right after the surgery and part of the next day. I know I had a morphine pump, but don't remember using it at all. I just don't remember any pain. Maybe it was the result of the morphine doing its job. I think you had it dripping thru the IV even if you did not do any extra pumping on the button. The day after surgery is the day you start walking on crutches and leaning how to use stairs. But my crutch lessons never happened. I remember early in the morning, the day after surgery, that the nurse wanted me to use the bedpan. OK, I am always game to try new and interesting things. The staff at the hospital wants things to happen naturally when it comes to functions of your body. Well, my body did not seem to want to function normally draped over that hard old bedpan. So the nurse decided to use a catheter to help me out. It really was not much of a problem for me since I am female and I felt much relieved after the

catheter did its job. I believe this was some kind of “one time catheter” since they did not leave it in place. I returned to snoring and sleeping.

About five hours later the cute male nurse assistant came back with the hard old bedpan. He managed to get the bedpan under me once again. I think I was actually successful this time, but all of a sudden I started having a great deal of pain. I have had sciatica attacks from my back in the past and just had one a week before I flew to Belgium. I thought at the time that I had hurt my back again. The degenerated discs decided to act up while I was away from home. Well, no matter what was causing the pain, it was very real and very intense. I started to cry, grabbing and twisting those poor ironed bed sheets to death. I was beside myself and did not know what to do about the pain. The nurse assistant was shocked and quickly called a nurse. The next thing I remember is the nurse giving me a shot with a great big needle right into the top of my right thigh, just like you see in the war movies. I am guessing it was morphine, but did not have the presence of mind to ask or even care as long as it worked. The shot did work and I slowly fell back to sleep forgetting all about the terrible pain.

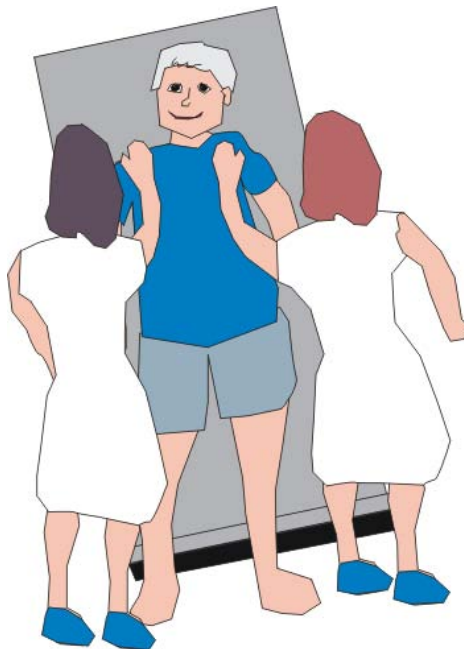
I was awakened shortly after for a trip to the x-ray facility. The doctor had ordered x-rays to make sure that my new hip was OK. I was thinking they would just wheel my bed down to the x-ray facility, but instead they put me into a wheelchair. I was so dopey from the pain medicine that I did not care what mode of transportation was used. I happily sat in the wheelchair and enjoyed the ride now that I was out of pain. Someone had pushed me thru the hospital, into the elevator and down to the x-ray department. Then they left me outside the door to wait my turn. There was a very proper, I assume Belgian, lady

sitting not too far from me in her wheelchair waiting for some kind of treatment also. She looked at me and then her eyes slowly moved down to my crotch area. In my pain med stupor, I looked down to see my little boy shorts I purchased for my operation, were wide open. They had taken me thru the hospital in my little shorts and a tee shirt. So in my goofy state I grabbed the bottom of my tee shirt and stretched it down over my shorts! What else did I have to work with sitting in a wheelchair by myself? Now I think about it, maybe the Belgian lady was just saying Hi to me, but I will never know.



Now that I had arrived safely to the x-ray facility, it was my turn to get onto the machine. This was a very interesting piece of equipment. You would normally stand with your back to the table while standing on a step that was part of the table. Then they would slowly tilt the table back. This was the table where I had my original x-rays taken during my pre op testing. But now I was stuck in a wheelchair with a new hip that did not seem to work well yet and no crutches. No one thought to send some crutches with me.

The two nice ladies in the x-ray room wondered why I had not been sent down in my bed? I said I didn't know, but here I am. Don't forget I am still in a morphine state of mind and quite happy at this point in time. The ladies decide to stand me up while holding me on either side. I am a rather large person at five foot eight inches and I am much heavier than I should be, weighing in at one hundred ninety-five pounds. The ladies were smaller than I was, but they were sure they could handle me. So they stood me up and held me against the table. Then as each held me on either side, they started to tilt the table. All three of us start to tilt backwards together. It would have been a perfect cartoon picture. I was never able to get my feet to stand on the foot ledge and my feet just hung over. Finally after tipping back for a while, one of the ladies yelled, "stop." She was getting very uncomfortable laying on her stomach while trying to holding me against the table.



At least after the bedpan incident, I was now able to use a walker to move around. I could now use the real bathroom. I don't think they would take a chance of placing me on a bedpan again.

The day of the bedpan battle was the day most people learned how to use the crutches and go up and down stairs. I was so goofy from the extra medicine feeling very dizzy and unsteady that no one insisted that I try to learn how to use crutches. Things slowly improved after I was able to move around a little on my walker. Normally a hip-resurfacing patient is able to put 100% of their weight on their operated leg soon after surgery. Now I can tell you that it is not easy to do because all the muscles and tendons have been upset. So technically it is possible, but mentally you don't feel it is possible.



Pat using her spiffy blue walker

I was once again able to talk with my great roommate and start to become a normal person rather than a junkie on pain medicine. I was able to eat part of my meals and start to visit with my friends once again. Life was getting much better post op.

The bedpan battle really put me behind everyone else by a couple days. I was the oldest at sixty-one and I think my age also slowed me down a little. Everyone else was in their fifties and scooting around on crutches like they used them all their lives. I did not mind using the walker for a few days. That is not normal protocol for Dr. De Smet's patients, but he allowed me to take the walker to the Holiday Inn along with my crutches. I told him that I felt very unsteady and did not want to fall. After all, I had just paid \$13,500 for a brand-new hip and did not want to injure it or my other hip. I really think the added pain shot in my thigh reacted with me and made me dizzy and unbalanced. But, I was on the road to recovery and Friday morning was the day of my release to the Holiday Inn. That sounded really good to me even though I had to get dressed and ride in a car. Everything in Belgium is an adventure.

Post Op at the Holiday Inn

Friday March 17

Friday was St. Patrick's day – a day of celebration for the Irish and for my new resurfaced hip. It was the day I would be released from the hospital. We were to be dressed and ready to leave at 11 a.m. I was really excited to return to the Holiday Inn where there would be great food, beer, my hippie friends and my husband.

Hugo, Dr. De Smet's assistant, came with a mini-van to escort us from the hospital to the Holiday Inn. I was still on my walker while everyone else was on crutches. I took my crutches with me because I knew Marc, the Physical Therapist, would teach me to use the crutches. I managed to ease my way into the front seat of the mini-van and enjoyed the escape from the hospital. Olga, my friend from Greece, was also being released. We were both operated on the same day and had quickly become friends. I was the eldest and the weakest at the time, so I got to use the front seat. The hospital care was fine, but the Holiday Inn offered much better meals and companionship.

I met Ted in the lobby and was very happy to be at my "home away from home." My bed looked great and I took a nap. I was very tired during the first few days after my surgery. I think the bedpan battle slowed me down more than just the surgery would have. The extra pain shot, which I think was morphine, lasted for more than a day. It made me dizzy and feeling a little "fuzzy" mentally, but I did not worry, I had my husband and my walker. I was quite able to move around and happy to be "home." The hotel had placed an extra mattress on top of my original bed so that it was much higher. We were suppose to follow the ninety-degree rule. We could not bend the top of our

bodies over our operated leg more than ninety degrees. There is a weakness in the hip capsule and muscles after surgery that could allow your new hip to become dislocated if you bend too far forward. The surgeon and his staff have to dislocate your hip to operate on it and it is done by bending it more than ninety degrees. There are explanations and videos of this process, but I have never had the courage to watch it. I just realize that there was an inherent possibility that bending too far forward could dislocate a new hip. This has happened in a few cases for hip resurfacing and for total hip replacements. It tends to happen more for total hip replacements since the size of the ball that replaces your femur bone is often smaller and can easily move out of place. That is one reason for choosing a hip resurfacing, the ball is the same size as your natural femur bone and does not dislocate as easily. Also the surgical technique tends to keep your new resurfaced hip more stable.

Meanwhile, I was happy to have my raised bed and my raised toilet seat. The toilet riser looks like a great big white, blown up life saver. It is much easier to sit on the higher seat when you have just been operated on. Again, it allows you to sit and rise without breaking the ninety-degree rule. Also it is just easier to use the toilet that way, much less strain on your legs and body after surgery.

I had several pairs of very loose fitting jeans and pants with me. Your incision is very tender and you don't want to have anything rubbing on it. I had bought some men's soft, cotton boxer shorts to wear under my pants. They were very easy to get on and off, and did not rub on my incision. There were part of my wardrobe for quite a few weeks.

My husband would have to put my TEDS, shoes and socks on for me for the next six weeks to keep me from breaking

the ninety-degree rule. You can't bend over to tie shoes without breaking the rule. You can, however, move your leg backwards to bend over and not break the rule. But you have to be careful not to lose your balance and fall down. I used the "slide your leg to the rear" trick many times during the following six weeks.

The TEDS are thrombo-embolic disease/devices or Anti-embolism stockings which are long, tight fitting "socks" that keep mild graduated pressure on the legs. They are used to prevent blood clots in the deep veins of your legs. Many hip surgeons suggest that their patients use them for about three weeks after surgery. Also most surgeons use some type of blood thinner. Dr. De Smet uses a form of heparin, which is an injectable anti-coagulant medicine. You give yourself shots in the tummy everyday for three weeks. The needles are very small and do not hurt. But it is still an interesting experience giving yourself shots if you haven't done it before. Some people do their own and others have someone else do them. They really don't hurt, but leave a lot of funny looking bruises on your tummy. It looks like there was a war going on. The bruises don't hurt and quickly disappear after you stop the shots.

Many people that take the blood thinners have problems sleeping. Most people recovering from hip surgery have problems sleeping during the night. I started sleeping much better after I finished my heparin shots. I have heard that many other hippies had the same experience. Many hippies sleep a lot in their lounge chairs after they get home. For some reason, sleeping on your back in a bed does not feel comfortable after surgery. I was able to sleep on my unoperated side about a week after surgery if I used a pillow between my legs. You need the pillow to maintain the proper space between your legs to protect the new hip, another precaution after surgery. I was able to sleep only

two or three hours at a time. This is what most hippies report that they are able to do too. I often got up and walk around at night to loosen up my stiff muscles, and then go back to bed.

The short time that your sleeping pattern is disrupted is a small price to pay for a great new hip with no pain. It is just part of the surgery recovery that most people accept and deal with. Hip surgery is very major surgery and it takes your body time to adjust after all the pain medicines, anesthesia and slicing and dicing.

The nice part about being in Belgium with a whole group of other hippies is you can cry on each other's shoulders about your lack of sleep or stiff muscles. But mostly, the other hippies are very happy and celebrating the beginning of a great, new pain free life with a wonderful new BHR.



Laraine, Lori and Pat

I enjoyed a wonderful dinner in the lounge of the Holiday Inn with several other hippies that had been released the day before. It was so nice to have new hippie friends in Belgium. We were all in the same boat and happy to be there. Crutches everywhere, smiles on all our faces and toasts to our new lives that we were just starting. The beer

in Belgium is great and we enjoyed many different varieties during the coming evenings at the Holiday Inn.

I had planned to rest and relax for Friday, Saturday and Sunday. I heard too many stories about hippies that started running around and sight seeing too quickly after their release from the hospital. They often ended up with swollen legs. So I wanted to rest to prevent any problems. I was also very tired and felt quite exhausted during the first few days I was released from the hospital.

The Holiday Inn had several public computers in the lobby. We purchased six cards for ninety minutes each while we were there. I was able to talk with all my surface hippy friends via internet from the Surface Hippy Yahoo Discussion Group. The group always likes to hear from hippies after surgery and follow their recoveries. Everyone has something new and interesting to tell the group. It is wonderful to have support from people who have already “been there and done that.”.

Saturday March 18

Saturday was my first full day out of the hospital. I was very happy to be at the Holiday Inn with my husband and all the other hippies. I met Mark, Dr. De Smet’s Physical Therapist. He is an excellent PT. He visited each hippy everyday. He would massage my very sore thigh muscle and then we would work thru a series of easy exercises. After getting warmed up, we would concentrate on walking. Walking properly with a good gait and standing tall with your shoulders back. Stair climbing was also included. The walking was tiring the first few days and Mark would know just how hard to push you. The stairs were a challenge everyday. Going down was not too difficult, but climbing up was tough with weak muscles.



Marc teaching Pat to climb stairs and walk properly



Marc teaching me to stand tall

We stayed in the hotel for the day and ate lunch in the lounge. We spent the evening with the other hippies taste testing Belgium Beer in the lounge.



Sunday March 19

Sunday was a repeat of Saturday. PT and a lot of resting. I spent time taking many naps since I could not sleep well at night. I thought the heparin shots were keeping me from sleeping well. But I had also been thru major surgery and had a ton of medicines left in my body which were probably a source of problems to me, too. I was able to lift my operated leg from the floor onto the bed by itself. Mark was very surprised that I could accomplish that. I could not do much else with it and abduction exercises were completely impossible. But life was good and I did not have much pain. We watched a lot of TV trying to figure out what people were saying in Dutch, French or German. Occasionally there were a few programs in English. My favorite programs turned out to be the cooking shows from England. There was also a great channel that gave the weather for many places in Europe with live TV cam coverage. So we had little tours all over Europe via TV.

We pretty much depended on the Holiday Inn for all our meals. Breakfasts were great. It was a beautiful buffet of every kind of breakfast food a person could want. Everything in Belgium seems so much more elegant than in the US. They never serve you a plain cup of tea or hot chocolate. Everything is special with cookies and candies, fancy doilies and sugars in long paper packages. Even in the little restaurants that we had visited and were to visit later in the week, everything was served so special. It was such a joy to enjoy European traditions.

Monday March 20

Monday was a repeat of Sunday. I was starting to get more energy and was able to walk around more. I even took little walks out in the parking lot. It was time for me to go to

Ghent once again, but Marc wanted me to wait until Tuesday. So we spent another quiet day at the Holiday Inn. I must admit, evenings were never quiet. We had the most wonderful hippy get togethers in the lounge each night. We had the nicest group of hippies and their spouses. I wish I could have saved all the wonderful times we had and the great laughing sessions. I wasn't sure how to do that except to bring them home in my heart and mind.



Hippies in the lounge – Pat, Sue, Brian, Hal, Ted, Mara, & Laraine



Hippy hall gathering

Tuesday March 21

Tuesday was my day to break free and eat a steak in Belgium. I was craving red meat. Maybe it was my body trying to get well. Olga, another hippie, and her husband Leo went to town with us. We had the most delicious steak at the DU PROGRESS. We had beef filets that were quite different than what we have in the US, but they were wonderful and tender. It was a such a great lunch. We walked a little, but I quickly tired out. Olga was younger and had much more energy than I did. So we decided to call it a day and returned to the Holiday Inn via cab. It was a little difficult getting in and out of the small cabs with my recently operated hip, but I managed with a little help. It was so good to see Ghent again. It is such a beautiful city.



Olga & Leo



Du Progress Restaurant

Wednesday March 22

Wednesday became another day of rest for me. I was very tired after my Tuesday excursion. We had not purchased any gifts for our friends at home and planned another trip to town on Thursday. We had a great carry out meal from a Chinese restaurant near the Holiday Inn. Ted walked to the restaurant and brought back some tasty treats for us. Meanwhile, we still did not miss an evening in the lounge with all our hippy friends.

Thursday March 23

I am growing stronger each day and am able to do my PT with Marc much better. I am having very little problems with the stairs, up or down. Life is really good. Ted and I went to Ghent to do our shopping in the afternoon. We found unique little items for our friends at home.



My favorite gift store and crutching around Ghent

Of course we had to take chocolate home too. We filled up a suitcase with quite a bit of Belgium Chocolate. We had a great little lunch and headed back to the Holiday Inn. I was sad to have to say goodbye to Ghent.



It is such a beautiful city with wonderful buildings, cathedrals, fountains, great shops and interesting

restaurants. I am sorry that we did not have time to visit more of Ghent and Belgium.



Going Home

Friday March 24

We said Goodbye to our hippie friends, the Holiday Inn, Belgium, Ghent, Dr. De Smet and his staff.



The Holiday Inn Ghent



Dr. De Smet & Pat



Hugo, Bart & Pat

We made sure we ordered a large cab to take us to the airport so our suitcases would fit. We had a difficult time when we arrived in Brussels because we took too many suitcases with us. We did not travel light. The airlines said we could each have two large suitcases plus our carry-ons. So we each loaded up two large suitcases. That was a mistake. We still had to do our laundry during our stay in Ghent. Ted walked to a nearby Laundromat to wash and dry our clothes. We actually had taken a partially empty suitcase assuming we would be buying gifts to bring home. If we ever travel to Belgium again, we definitely would travel much lighter. It is a real chore to lug all those suitcases around the airports and try to get them into small European cabs.

It took about forty-five minutes to get from the Holiday Inn to the airport. We had the nicest cab drivers during our stay in Belgium. All were great except one crazy weekend driver that drove 100 miles an hour and tried to hit everyone and everything in his way. Every other driver was so polite and had so much to share about Belgium and their lives there. I learned a lot and really enjoyed talking with them. I was lucky and always got to sit up front because of my newly operated hip.

I was moved via a wheelchair thru the Brussels Airport to meet my flight to go home. We went two hours early like the airlines suggested. "Check in" at Brussels went very fast and then the wheelchair pusher took me to the boarding gate. It was miles from nowhere and we had two hours to wait. So I asked if Ted could push me back to one of the coffee shops. She said only United employees could push me and took me back to the coffee shop. It was at least a quarter mile from the gate. She left us and said she would be back at 11:00 a.m. since the plane boarded at 11:20. Well, the time went by and she did not return. It was 11:15 and I was getting worried. Ted was going to push the wheelchair to the gate but it was locked and the wheels would not turn. Either she left it locked or Ted ended up locking it when he was trying to release the brake. I sent him running down to the gate to get help while I was a prisoner in my chair. Of course I could have walked, but it was a really long, long walk on crutches.

Finally I saw a United employee in a golf cart heading my way. YEAH! I thought I would get into the cart and ride. Wrong - she unlocked the wheelchair and grabbed the wheelchair arm, while sitting in the cart, and took off. I was racing thru the airport like a sidecar on a motorcycle! Those golf carts can go really fast. She said she would get into a lot of trouble if her boss saw her. It was very smooth until she misguided the wheelchair and I banged against the golf cart several times. It was the ride of a life time. Quite interesting, the speeding wheelchair incident.

The flight home was similar to the flight going to Belgium. Actually we had most of the same crew on the plane when we returned. I was very fortunately to have a bulkhead seat reserved for me. There was a lot of leg room between the bulkhead and my seat. I am five foot eight inches tall and

have quite long legs. I was able to easily stand and stretch in front of my seat. I was allowed to use the Business Class handicapped toilet, which made the flight easier. We were in the middle three seats and there was no one to share the seats with us. I was able to move over to the right-hand seat and lift the arm rest to give my hip a little more room. Even the Economy Plus seats seem narrow to me. All went well and it was a great flight home. I really got tired about six hours into the flight, so I took a little walk and stretched some more. I tried to get up to stretch and walk about every hour as I was suggested by Marc the PT. We were served a nice meal about an hour before landing and that helped the time pass more quickly.

After we arrived at the Washington, D.C. airport, it was not as pleasant. The wheelchair pushers were all in a hurry and hit every bump they could find. The security was terrible. I had to be searched while I was sitting in the wheelchair. We were just scheduled to get on a puddle jumper plane to go to Charleston WV. I don't think many terrorists are headed in that direction, but we sure got a going over. After being pushed all thru the airport and then riding the bus a great distance, I was exhausted when we got to the terminal for our shuttle flight. I just wanted to lie down and take a nap.

It was crowded like a cattle barn, I never saw so many people packed into a building. I felt terrible and started to cry. I just did not want to get onto that little plane. I knew the seats were very narrow and I was afraid they were going to hurt my hip. I felt like it had swollen up some during the eight and one-half hour flight from Belgium. I just wanted to lie down and wished that our car was parked in DC rather than Charleston, WV. It is about a six-hour drive from DC to our home in Marietta, OH. How I wished we had driven to DC to catch our plane to Belgium. I told

Ted that I just could not get on the plane, so we cancelled our flight. I wanted to find a motel to rest until the next day. The Travelers Aid folks helped us find a great Comfort Suites room for only sixty dollars. I guess they have some specials for folks in need and I felt like I was in need at that point. A cab took us to our motel. It felt like an oasis in the desert to me. It was a large suite with the most comfortable beds you can imagine. I immediately laid down and slept. Ted had to go back to the airport to try and find our luggage. It took him quite a bit of time and effort, but finally he found where they had put our bags. Somehow, we were finally in a quiet room with great beds and our luggage. I said a little prayer of Thanks!

We rented a car the next day, Sunday, and headed home. The car rental was not very busy and offered Ted an upgrade. He brought a nice big Lincoln Towncar back to the motel to chauffeur me home. It was a beautiful sunny day and the trip was great. The car seats were much more comfortable than the puddle jumper plane seats would have been. Life was good once again.

The Cherry Blossoms were out all over DC and were beautiful. I had never seen them before and felt it was a gift to view them.



Cherry Blossoms from our motel window

Our trip home took six hours by car. The puddle jumper plane would have been much quicker, but I know the car was much more comfortable than the small plane. I would never plan to ride in a small plane with narrow seats again if I ever had my other hip resurfaced. Maybe the seats seemed extra narrow to me since I am an older lady with a few extra pounds added to my backend, but they sure seemed small to me.

Home Again

Everything looked great as we pulled into our driveway at home. The dogs were ecstatic to see us. We had been gone fifteen days. I was using two crutches at this point since I was so tired from the trip and the dogs seemed to understand that Mom was very stiff and slow moving. They honored me by not jumping up and just ran in circles and barked.

Home looked so good. My lounge chair felt so good. Our American food tasted so good. The American beer, however, did not taste as good as Belgium Beer!

My own bed felt wonderful and my raised toilet seat adaptor made life easy again. Not all restrooms were easy to use with a newly resurfaced hip, but with a little effort, I was able to pretty much keep from breaking the ninety-degree rule during my trip.

I was able to drive to Wal-Mart the next day with my neighbor. I actually walked the whole store using one crutch. I hadn't been able to walk the store for a long time due to my past hip pain. Life was really good without pain.

I still got very tired and took many naps. I was not able to sleep well until I stopped the heparin shots. Thank goodness the TEDS and the heparin shots were only used for three weeks. The shots were done with very small needles and really did not hurt. But somehow putting that little needle into your stomach every day was not easy. I managed and made sure that I took them all and wore my TEDS. I had read studies that showed the combination of the two have a 55 to 75 percent chance of preventing blood clots in the legs after surgery.

My husband and I walked just under a mile each day for the first few weeks. I walked slowly at first, but as the days and

weeks wore on, my speed picked up. I stopped using a crutch inside the house at four weeks post op. I still used a cane on my walks just in case I got tired. A few weeks after that, I stopped using a cane.

My hip muscles became very stiff at six weeks post op. My hip muscles would hurt with the first few steps after sitting for a while. I had a doctor friend with a therapy pool and he let me have water therapy free. The water walking, stretching and exercises in the pool really helped to loosen up my muscles. After a few weeks of therapy, I did not need to continue the water therapy. My muscles seemed to be back in shape.

I no longer needed to maintain the ninety-degree rule after six weeks. I was still too stiff to be able to bend over to tie my shoes easily, but within a few weeks, I had no trouble bending down to tie my shoes or put my socks on.

Life was good and I was quickly forgetting about my new BHR. I have some clunking in the hip when I sit and move around. I had the clunking from the beginning right after surgery. Dr. De Smet said it was because the muscles around the new hip were weak. Eventually, they should strengthen and the clunking will go away. It does not hurt in any way, but it is a strange feeling to have your hip go clunk. I guess it is just the new BHR's way of reminding me of my great new hip.

I expect that as the months go by, my hip will get stronger and stronger. At five months post op, I hardly think about my new hip anymore. I can still see the red incision line and it is tender, especially if I sit in a really hard chair. I know that it will continue to heal and be less sensitive as time goes on.

I plan to be as active as possible with my new resurfaced hip and hope that it will last a long time. My bone density had decreased and Dr. De Smet said that if I walked a lot, it would continue to increase. He said that it should return to a normal range after a year. Weight bearing activities help build bone density, so I plan to do a lot of walking with my new hip.

Life is far better since I have a new BHR. I don't take any pain medicines anymore and actually sleep well at nights. It had been years since I slept well at all. The old hip was a constant aggravation. You start to slowly accept a life of inactivity and pain. It sneaks up on you until your main activities are sitting in a chair and taking pain pills.

I don't know how long my new BHR will last. I hope it will stay with me for the rest of my life. I do realize that bones don't always stay strong as people get older and there is a possibility of needing a revision at some time in the future. At least I have a complete femur bone left to accept a revision if needed.

I have absolutely no regrets about going to Belgium to have my hip resurfaced. I felt I chose one of the best doctors in the world. There is nothing that I would change about the experience except to take less luggage on the trip and try to spend more time in Belgium.

The Last Chapter

The Last Chapter has not been written. I am hoping that it will take years to write. There is no way of knowing if my new BHR will last five, ten or twenty years. I am sure that the metal on metal configuration of the actual hip prosthesis would last any person's lifetime, but the real question is, will the bone supporting my new BHR last the rest of my lifetime. I don't know nor does Dr. De Smet. I have had some bone loss due to my inactivity and my osteoarthritis. Dr. De Smet feels that weight-bearing activity such as walking will improve my bone density over time. He felt it would improve quite a bit in six months and perhaps be back to a normal level after a year.

The bone must remain strong to continue to support the pin and cap placed on the femoral head. The same risk exists for a THR. Many THR's are revised during a person's lifetime. The large stem that is placed down into the femur bone can become loose along with many other problems. Most people with artificial hips know that there will probably be at least one or more revisions waiting for them during their lifetime, especially if they are younger.

I plan to continue my journey to become a very active person again and walk every day. I see no reason to become inactive again unless my other hip or knees begin to bother me. The doctor told me that my back, hip and knee problems from pre op times will get better when the bad hip is replaced. The new hip replacement allows the body to become balanced once again and function much more normally.

I can only say that the BHR has changed my life. If you have a bad hip and are seeking a solution to your pain and inactivity, please consider hip resurfacing. I have included

information in the Appendix that has links to my website <http://www.surfacehippy.info> which includes a large amount of information that I have collected.



Pat and part of her doggie family

Appendix - Hip Resurfacing Information

Surface Hippy.info Website

<http://www.surfacehippy.info>

Description of BHR by Dr. McMinn

<http://www.surfacehippy.info/bhrmcminn.php>

List of Doctors performing hip resurfacing

<http://surfacehippy.info/hip-resurfacing-surgeons/>

Ages of Surface Hippies

<http://www.surfacehippy.info/agesurvey.php>

Discussion Group about Hip Resurfacing

<http://www.surfacehippy.info/discussion/>