

A Matter of Life and Jeff

Recently I have been undergoing a number of medical tests. As a prelude to my shoulder surgery I underwent a raft of tests to check out my suitability for surgery and I have nothing but praise for the pre-op assessment unit at the Royal Dorset County Hospital in Dorchester, who checked me over. In a matter of some twenty-two minutes they had done a urinalysis, blood pressure, check my pulse, taken blood samples, sent me for a full set of X-rays of my shoulder, an ECG, measured my height and weight, tested for MRSA and prepared a full set of notes for the surgeon.

That didn't stop them stating the obvious, that I am morbidly obese and should try to lose a few stones before the op. I was warned that I am a prime candidate for diabetes and heart disease and went home feeling as though I had been put on a final warning.

After a reasonably healthy salad for my evening meal I retired to bed early.

I woke up at about 01.30 am with a pain in my chest. At first I tried to ignore it, hoping that it would go away. After about twenty minutes of searing pains I reached for the Rennie's and crunched up a few. I waited a bit longer but the pain did not fade.

An image came into my mind of the recent NHS poster campaign that depicts a tubby chest, very much like my own, with a belt tightly strapped around it advising that if you feel a pain like this you should seek medical help. It was an image that stayed with me for the next hour.

When the pains started to move down my arm I started to become concerned. After lying there for what seemed like hours convincing myself that there was nothing wrong and I was just being a hypochondriac I started to wonder if there might be something wrong.

Eventually I decided to go downstairs and call for an ambulance. Treading carefully, so as not to disturb the other members of the household, I crept downstairs. At the bottom of the stairs I straightened up and the pain became almost intolerable. I gasped and a huge belch rattled up my throat. I swear I heard it echo back from the buildings on the other side of the road.

The effect was startling. Firstly the discomfort was instantly gone. Secondly Malcolm, who was sleeping on the window sill, his nose firmly covered by his tail, leapt up, and flew across the room, knocking over the small collection of family photographs. His flight woke Stanley who was squeezed into an unnatural heap in a corner of one of the sofas. They collided in the middle of the floor, causing the rug to crumple up as their feet scrabbled for purchase in their eagerness to leave the room.

The other two cats were outside decimating the local wildlife and made their entrance through the cat flap with a great deal of noise and commotion. The peace of Town Hall Lane was shattered at precisely 02.45 am.

Bedroom doors opened and concerned faces appeared to enquire what the fuck all the noise was.

To the sound of disturbed sleepers sweeping up broken glass and rearranging floor coverings I went back upstairs, got into bed and slept like a baby for what little remained of the night.