Staircase in the Dark: Kathy Otten’s Fall Story

Fall prevention is often associated with the elderly. I want others to know, that is not always the case. In July 2019, I returned from a wonderful vacation to Colorado with my family. Two days later, I found myself in a very different situation.

A person standing in front of a building

Description automatically generatedI remember getting up in the middle of the night to put some Lipton Iced Tea in the refrigerator for my husband to take to work the next day. I have gone through my living room to the kitchen in the dark hundreds of times before. This time was different. On my way back to the bedroom, I reached for the corner, not realizing I was at the top of my basement stairway. I remember feeling the open space and then the falling began.

I fell head-first down a flight of 15 steps to the basement. I remember feeling the thud on my head and hitting against the railing on my left side. Nothing could stop me. When I reached the bottom, I was conscious, and I knew I was hurt. My left side and my back hurt, and I couldn’t get out of the contorted position I was in. I yelled to my husband for help and worried that he would never hear me. He uses a C-Pap and takes his hearing aids out at night, so he is the next thing to deaf.

By a miracle that only God could have made, he heard me and came to my rescue. He wondered if I was able to move and so did I. I am a 64-year old retired nurse. I knew if I couldn’t move my feet, I could be paralyzed. Being on a blood thinner, I also recognized the risk of a severe head bleed. We both realized I was not going anywhere, and my husband immediately called 911.

I was still conscious and remember the first person to arrive was the police. Shortly after, the fire and rescue department and the ambulance arrived. They were able to come down a different set of stairs from our garage and help me onto the stretcher. I remember them starting an IV to give me pain medicine, and then I must have drifted off. When I arrived at the hospital, they began asking my husband all sorts of questions. I was able to answer some of them. Then they took me off for X-rays, CT scan and did lab work.

It was determined I had fractured my left clavicle (collar bone) and four ribs. Fortunately, I didn’t have a head bleed. I ended up staying in the hospital for a day until I could get my pain under control, and we could make a plan for how I was going to function at home alone. My husband had to get me a shower chair because I needed to have something safe to sit on. It was several weeks before I was able to get back to doing some of my regular activities and several months before the majority of my pain left.

I was so grateful to God for watching over me and sending His angels that night. I was also grateful to the excellent caregivers from Tea police, fire and rescue and Sanford Hospital for coming to my rescue. I am grateful that my husband was awakened by some angels that night to hear my cry for help.

I am writing this to let you know how important it is to have nightlights in your hallways to light your path. By this simple effort, my fall could have been prevented. I have them in my hall now, and I am not afraid to turn on the lights at night! Be smart and be safe!!