

# Holiday Ups and Downs

By Philip A. Baer, MDCM, FRCPC, FACR

A lovely thing about Christmas is that it's compulsory, like a thunderstorm, and we all go through it together.  
- Garrison Keillor

The time has come to close the books on another year of highs and lows, work and play, remissions and exacerbations, and any other pairing of extremes you care to mention.

The holiday season is meant to be a time of celebration and reunions with family and friends. However, the real world frequently intrudes. In the prototypical Christmas film, "It's a Wonderful Life", the protagonist George Bailey is not in the mood for partying. Rather, he has to be persuaded not to kill himself and not to view his life as a failure, due to the impact of the Great Depression on his life and his town.

I am hoping for a calm peaceful holiday season this year, but that has not always been in the cards in recent years. I remember December 2009 vividly. My wife Erica had just undergone orthopedic surgery, and was in a walking boot. Our son Aaron called us just before Christmas to tell us he had a broken 5<sup>th</sup> metatarsal (Jones fracture). Apparently these occur with minimal or no trauma in younger people. He was living in London, Ontario at the time, studying at Western University. With the holidays, his roommates away, and a painful foot, he found it hard to manage. I recall driving in the middle of the night from Toronto to London, picking him up from the local emergency room, packing up some supplies, and bringing him home to stay with us. Finding orthopedic follow-up care between Christmas and New Year's is not easy, but we squeezed him in at the Fracture Clinic where Erica already had an appointment.

Christmas 2013 put the shoe on the other foot, though this time no casts or crutches were involved. The ice storm



Comrades in feet: Dr. Erica Weinberg and Aaron Baer, JD.

that struck Ontario left us in the dark December 22<sup>nd</sup>. Living in a 12<sup>th</sup> floor condominium, we eventually ended up without light, heat, water, and power when our building's backup diesel generator ran out of fuel. Seeing buildings right across the street from us have their power restored days before us did not help the mood, nor did walking up and down 12 flights of stairs with a flashlight as the only illumination. I was almost happy to be working right up until Christmas Eve, as my office had power and

provided a place to recharge all our electronics, shave, and brew something warm to drink.

On Christmas Eve, faced with the prospect of ongoing power and water disruptions, we decided to move in with Aaron, by now living in a downtown Toronto condo that had been bypassed by the ice storm. We started a new holiday tradition by enjoying Christmas dinner at a Vietnamese restaurant in Toronto's Chinatown. Hot food tasted even better after three days of eating whatever food we had salvaged from our fridge and freezer and stored outside on our balcony. Aaron was a great host. Within a few hours, we found out our power was restored at home—the best present in recent memory!

My hope for this holiday season: Good food, good company, and no power failures. Enjoy!

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