



## **Table of Contents**

<i>Introduction .....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>1. What's Going On Here? .....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>2. I Don't Know About You, But I'm Not One Of Those People Who Enjoys Being Devastated.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>3. I See The Brochure, But Where's The Shuffleboard? .....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>4. Holiday Cheer, Sort Of.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>5. The Trousseau .....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>6. I Can't Believe I'm Going To India Tomorrow To Have My Hip Joints Replaced .....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>7. I Can't Believe I'm Going To India Today To Have My Hip Joints Replaced .....</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>8. Here's The Deal About The E-Mails .....</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>9. First E-Mail: The First Five Days.....</i>	<i>63</i>

10. <i>India, Part Deux</i> .....	71
11. <i>India As Seen From Inside</i> .....	73
12. <i>The Meltdown And The Resurrection – Sort Of</i> .....	75
13. <i>If I’m One With The Universe, Why Aren’t We All Going     Though This?</i> .....	81
14. <i>Just An Ordinary Day</i> .....	87
15. <i>Demonic Possession</i> .....	93
16. <i>Free At Last, Free At Last!</i> .....	95
17. <i>No Internet Connection? Why Don’t You Just     Kill Me?</i> .....	99
18. <i>The Only Blonde In India</i> .....	105
19. <i>Just Loungin’ Around In My Harem Pants</i> .....	111
20. <i>What A Difference A Dray Makes</i> .....	115
21. <i>Dinner With The Doctor</i> .....	121
22. <i>Old Delhi</i> .....	127
23. <i>The Inner Game Of Sightseeing</i> .....	131
24. <i>Shukriya</i> .....	135
25. <i>A Chair With 40 Positions</i> .....	139
26. <i>Part 18 – The Fun Never Stops</i> .....	149
27. <i>Christopher’s Not The Only One Walken</i> .....	153
28. <i>Contest Winners</i> .....	157

29. *What I Haven't Told You*..... 163

30. *A Sense of Self (From My Viewpoint and Theirs)*..... 167

31. *Metal of Honor* ..... 177

*Afterword* ..... 181

*Places To Go In New Delhi* ..... 183

*Acknowledgements* ..... 187



## ***Introduction***

I keep myself in shape. As my surgeon in India said, I am “very fit. Very fit.” I did not see a medical crisis approaching and when it slammed into me, my “insurance provider” was as upright and fair as a slumlord.

Because I couldn’t afford the care I needed in America, I had an unintentional adventure. Most of us have those in small doses. They usually involve dating. Or getting lost. Or jury duty. This was a big dose. Major surgery, culture shock, and insurance hassles. Without having left the United States, I would have continued to suffer and lose ground until I could manage to pay for the surgery here – which might have taken years. While I found that unacceptable, I had to accept it. I also found the idea of traveling to a third world country unacceptable. That move turned out to be a blessing.

It was an ordeal, but a rich one. A country that initially overwhelmed me became my salvation and some of its people my friends. And I’ll give you the end of the story right here: I’m more than okay. I’m fixed, fully active, and I know a few words in Hindi.

PHYLLIS KATZ

This book is divided into three sections: Part one covers how I was forced to go 8,000 miles away for decent, affordable medical treatment and how I found the help and courage to do it. Part two – the collection of e-mails I sent to family and friends – chronicles my experiences and state of mind from departure to just after my return. (*I have since remembered more detail and added it to the e-mails, to keep it all in sequence. Also, I have changed a few names.*) And part three deals with my recuperation and, not surprisingly, brief interaction with my “insurance” company. In that section I also include (*in case you, too, have to leave home for a medical procedure*), a few good places to go in New Delhi while you’re on a walker, feeling half alive and, if you’re blonde, being stared at as though you’d just stepped off a starship.



## ***Dinner With The Doctor***

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**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2009**

**11:50 P.M. NEW DELHI**

**10:20 A.M. LOS ANGELES**

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Georgecloonhi,

Two hailstorms woke me last night. They weren't violent so much as exotic and I found them soothing. The first one startled me. Once I realized what was happening, I shut my eyes and went back to sleep. The second storm relaxed me. For a while, I lay still, listening, feeling melted into the wholeness of the universe. Then I tried to turn on my side and remembered who and where I was.

This morning we went back to Gurgaon, where I had my staples removed. Ouch. My spiritual practice has taken me a step closer to understanding myself as one with everything. I now know how paper feels. While on the

table, Dr. Hegde suggested I contract dysentery before I leave India, so that I can clean out my system. I love this man.

Our drive back to Delhi was less crazy this time. Oh there were cattle migrating alongside the road and the occasional guy urinating on a ruin, but this time everyone and everything seemed to occupy its own section of the landscape. I started to feel order in the universe.

I accompanied Rob to his dentist, Dr. Kapoor, who owns the most modern equipment I've ever seen. The chairs look like lava lamp globules. They're kind of a butterscotch/melon color -- very space age -- and the one I lay in provided me with the first comfortable prone position I've had in 14 days. Figuring I had nothing to lose, I had my teeth cleaned.

The rest of the daylight hours were spent riding to different areas where people tried unsuccessfully to sell us things we didn't want. I don't understand the universal assumption that everyone needs another rug. The main benefit here was that I got to practice struggling up and down stairs. I'm gaining speed.

Then came dinner with Dr. Hegde, his two associates, Dr. Oberoi and Dr. Saroup, and four other people, including our guest house neighbors, Gerry and Sandy from Youngstown.

## HIPWRECKED

Gerry has new knees. He and Sandy have been rabid for an earlier departure date, which they managed to swing. You know, if you stay at the guest house and you're not into Indian food, it can put a damper on a trip to India. We were all getting crabby being away from home and not feeling well, but we share a love for Dr. Hegde and gratitude for the whole team. And this was one fabulous night on the town.

We ate at Oh, Calcutta, a restaurant that serves East Indian cuisine – where I spent the evening playing “Yes and...” Dr. Hegde suggested I have a glass of wine. I found that puzzling.

“Are you sure I should be drinking?” I asked, and he answered, “You should have a drink and one for the road.” I figured if it wasn't a good idea, at least I would be at a table full of people who could treat me if I were to become unconscious. I ate and drank everything they put in front of me that wasn't an animal, including about five kinds of desserts. The food was outstanding.

Dr. Hegde and Dr. Oberoi bookended me. Dr. Oberoi (*Remember? Handsome, shoved a needle in my hand?*) is an orthopedic surgeon, a mountain climber and guide, and a blues harpist. When I told him I was born and raised in Chicago, he said he worked for a while at Cook County Hospital in Chicago -- a dive – because Chicago had such good blues.



A little later, he moved over so that I could talk with Dr. Saroup, who also climbs mountains and says that all great rock music came from America – “Elvis Presley, The Eagles, Brenda Lee, The Carpenters” – to which Dr. Hegde replied, heatedly, “How can you put rock music and The Carpenters in the same sentence?”

Hegde also told us a sensational anecdote about having treated a popular swami for an injury.

*(Both Rob and I have been telling this story since we returned to California. Each of us remembered it differently. So I contacted Dr. Hegde and asked him to tell it in his own words. It turns out we both got it a little wrong. I have an excuse. I was on medication. It follows below.)*

“A swami from a well known sect was involved in a car accident. He was taken to the nearest primary health centre where an x-ray of the chest revealed a cracked rib. We were summoned from our hospital in the city and by the time we reached the primary health centre in the village, a large congregation of devotees had gathered, concerned about their spiritual leader’s health. When we questioned him about the discomfort, his followers piped up on his behalf and claimed that since the Swami had reached a higher consciousness he was oblivious to pain. While examining him physically once again, the followers kept on singing praises about the Swami’s control of pain while the man in question

## HIPWRECKED

smiled beatifically. I was certain that he had suffered a fractured rib after looking at the x-ray film. I was also slightly irritated with the inane smiling countenance of the creature and his snivelling brood. So I decided to call a spade a spade and gave him a firm but quick jab at the tender spot. This must have hurt like hell because there was this sudden intake of breath and then a bellow...O mara bapa (*Oh my father*) escaped the Swami's lips, and laid bare the claims of self-control. The followers were not happy at all and were glad to see my back."

After Dr. Hegde finished his story, he let out a gigantic laugh. You have to love this guy.

At the end of the meal we were served a plate of little stuffed, rolled up betel leaves on toothpicks. The dish is called paan. You pull one off the toothpick and hold it in your cheek, like tobacco, and it acts as a stimulant. I told Dr. Hegde I felt that two major surgeries had been stimulating enough. Still, I was in for the whole experience, even if it meant chewing something carcinogenic. And anyway, "When in Rome..."

Once stimulated, we all weighed in on the westernization of the entire world. Then we hit the street and said our goodbyes. I felt a growing sadness that I wasn't going to see them again. I mean it. They're decent, enthusiastic people who look you in the eye when they talk to you and are surprisingly uninterested in who else is in the restaurant.

PHYLLIS KATZ

Back at the guest house, I readied myself for bed and saw what I look like without the bandages. Frankenstein.

I'm not freaked anymore, just impatient to heal. I'm starting to enjoy seeing families of cattle, dogs, boars, and human beings mingle without any fear or hostility. Maybe it's a kind of Stockholm syndrome. I don't know.

Om Henrhi,

Phyllis