

The 44% Solution (my drug-free days coming to an end)

This morning I may have seen the light at the end of the tunnel, the reason that I voluntarily set up a doctor's appointment for the first time in 30+ years ("voluntarily" as in not a visit to fix something broken). That light came from a trip to Kaiser's pulmonary testing lab, where my lung capacity was measured with, and without, "help."

You're hooked up to a breathing tube, your nose is pinched off, and you have a Doctor/Tech/Coach who's telling you to breathe normal, breathe normal, breathe normal etc etc etc and then, at some random point, suddenly raises her voice and says "BREATHE DEEP!" followed by "EXHALE FAST! KEEP GOING! KEEP GOING! GET EVERY LAST BIT OUT OF YOUR LUNGS! DON'T STOP! KEEP GOING!" (and that "keep going" goes on long after you feel like there's simply nothing left you can exhale, leaving you wondering what possible reason exists for the last 20 seconds of the exercise, but she insists that it's important to keep trying to get rid of every last non-existent molecule of air that might still be in your now-collapsed lungs).

Waiting for the start of each breathe deep/exhale fast session is similar to the Drop Zone ride, where you're sitting at the edge of a precipice, not knowing when you're suddenly going to be dropped so fast that your stomach and mouth trade places. You try to anticipate, look for body language telling you she's about to switch gears, but you can't spend too much effort doing so because you need to have all the strength you can muster to perform the breathe deep/exhale ritual. And being competitive, I want to do as well as I can!

After going through this routine maybe 5 times, I'm then fed a new breathing tube, this one sending some sort of fine mist into my lungs. You breathe this stuff in & out normally for maybe 5 minutes (seems longer; it's not very exciting), and then do the breathe deep/exhale session again.

Result? Whatever was in that mist improved my lung capacity by 44%. This is the most seriously-good-news I've had in a long time. Better life ahead through chemistry. Maybe I can stop wheezing on the climb up Kings in the morning. Maybe I won't face the humiliation of having to get off the bike for a bit on a steep climb in France ever again.

But wait, there's more! The woman running these tests? She's a cyclist. She and her husband are totally into the Tour de France. She's also a nut for Sunflower photos, of which, sadly, I have none from my most-recent trip. But the bike connection is real, and she's going to get me set up on the V02 measuring bike, complete with EKG measuring. Basically a stress test and V02 all-in-one. Cool not just because it's cool, but also because there are times when one wonders about mortality issues related to being 50+ and a stress test can identify all sorts of usually-correctable things that could cause issues.

So overall, I feel like the ordeal of having that thing I fear pretty much more than anything else, a blood test, which kept me away from Doctors for ages, may have been worthwhile. That's how I feel today. Ask me after I've been through a colonoscopy, which is likely hiding out there, ready to show up any day now on my appointment calendar.