

Martha and Jack Harich's 2002 Christmas Card

Each year we've created a piece of original art for our Christmas card. Usually it's been a poem and original artwork. But this year has been so different, and there are so many things to tell, that we have switched to a recap of everything that happened during 2002.

The big story at home is we've been putting in oak tongue and groove flooring to replace the carpeting. Once this is done Martha's allergies should get quite a break. But it's a big job. So far we have the guest bedroom done. Before we could start on the other rooms, Jack had to leave for his big trip on September 5.

Jack had to go to Nantes, France to see the best doctors in the world for his sitting pain problem, a form of pudendal neuropathy. So why not make it longer and turn it into a once in a lifetime vacation? That's just what he did—ten weeks of backpacking, hiking the Alps, seeing the villages that time forgot, camping in mountain forests where woodcutters have been coming for thousands of years, meeting ever so many friendly Frenchmen and women, and enjoying life in a different culture. After lots of hiking, Jack arrived in Nantes to see the doctors about his problem.

The interdisciplinary team gave him examinations, tests, and diagnostic shots. Conservative treatment of local steroids and muscle reeducation was tried. Nothing helped. For over a month the team could not figure out why he was having pain in an area not served by the pudendal nerve, but yet an injection of local anesthetic to the nerve caused the pain to go away. Scratching their heads, they were totally mystified and told Jack there was nothing further they could do.

But Jack was desperate, so he persisted and wrote up a list of issues and clues on his case and went back to the doctors. They studied that list, looked at their own notes on his case, thought real hard, and Eureka! They figured out that Jack's pudendal nerve must have an unusual route. This would explain everything. So they now leaned towards surgery.



The Arc de Triomphe, commissioned in 1806 by Napoleon, shortly after his victory at Austerlitz, and completed in 1836.

It's not every day such a rare case comes along, so the doctors decided to analyze Jack's case closely and write up an article. They X rayed him and zapped him with MRIs. They discovered he had only one left leg and one right ear. Suddenly they knew this was the case of a lifetime. The patient was so rare he was the only one in the world with his social security number. Not only that, but he could talk and listen at the same time! So the only logical thing to do was to invite every surgeon in Europe to the operation.

So many came they decided to move the operation to Paris. Convinced they were about to make one of the most important discoveries in the history of medicine, they discreetly asked if the Arc de Triomphe was available. Since the tourist season was over, it was. So they rolled Jack down the Avenue des Champs Elysees, to right under the middle of the Arc de Triomphe, as ten thousand surgeons followed right along in their scrubs, all talking about what might be found inside once the operation began.

Helicopters swooped overhead, carrying giant screens to watch the gory details on. One was hung on each side of the arch. But this was not enough for the multitudes still arriving, so they stretched a



cable over to the Eiffel Tower and hung a few more screens on that. And then the operation began.

The chief surgeon pulled up Jack's favorite hiking T-shirt as he gazed upon his 100% Pure Optimism button. His assistant pulled down Jack's drawers. The crowd gasped as the camera zoomed in and found a note, in ink in Jack's own handwriting, on his right

buttock. It said, "Please be careful." The roar of the crowd stopped in an instant. Things were getting serious.

The surgeon held aloft a tarnished silver scalpel for all to see. It was the very one used by Doctor Frankensmirth in his historic first dissection of a tadpole, which proved conclusively that frogs come from smaller frogs.

Historic treaties are traditionally signed with dozens of pens so they can be given to friends, butlers, and cab drivers who keep losing theirs. So too was the first incision now made with 256 copies of the Frankensmirth scalpel, all engraved for the occasion. After each millimeter of the cut was made, a fresh scalpel was used. The old one was passed down a long line of distinguished surgeons, who studied it intently for signs of the patient's blood type, dietary preferences, and favorite politicians.

At this point a little dabbing with a sponge was needed to soak up something that looked suspiciously like lots of blood. Always the gentleman, even in trying circumstances, the patient reached into his backpack and pulled out the five-gallon bucket and sponge he had been showering in to save up money for the operation. He then politely went back to unconsciousness so as to not offend the knock-em-out specialist.

A little piece of string was next found, with a tag saying, "Pull string to open." This standard step was covered in all the textbooks. The chief string puller stepped forward. Fresh from the Academy of Stringologists, he was well versed in pulls, tugs, twitches, switches, and itches, as well as how to get all that stuff back inside again. He looked around to be sure of enough space for The Pull. The crowd moved back. He pulled. And he pulled. And he pulled some more. Finally, with just the right dramatic finesse and string tension, one final tug opened a flawless incision, as he shouted, "Voila!" and leaped aside.

A helicopter hovered in for an extreme close up. And there it was, the rarest pudendal nerve in the entire world. Flash bulbs popped. Women swooned. Hats were thrown high in the air. France's finest had done it again! A band struck up the national anthem.

The chief bottomtologist now had his quarry in sight. It was only a matter of time and luck before he and the interdisciplinary team gloriously prevailed. Pulling out Sherlock Holmes' best magnifying glass, he leaned forward to study the nerve's exact route. Out came the necessary Michelin maps and guidebooks.

He next conferred briefly with his assistant, who then discussed the matter with his own assistant, who then, having no assistant, found consul in a used flashbulb. Finding the exact bit of advice needed there, as well as the answer to all the problems in the universe, he then turned around and spoke to the chief's assistant's assistant, who spoke to the chief's assistant, who gave the chief bottomtologist the answer, which was, "I don't know." Reporters in the front row who overheard this began scribbling furiously with their sterilized pencils. Information! Data! News!



The lightweight French helicopter used to film the entire operation. This is the very latest model, engineered especially for severe weather conditions and close in camera work at unusual events.

The rest of the operation went astonishingly well. Like a carefree drive in the countryside, the nerve route was so pleasantly scenic it took only 32 hours and 8 wrong turns to follow, using the maps, guidebooks, and yellow highlighters. As they sewed up the patient with a leather thong from Napoleon's favorite riding boots, the crowd paused in rapt anticipation. Was the operation a success? Would the patient recover or not?

Since the world needed to know right now, the Great Grand Prognosis Predictor flipped a euro to decide as all heads bowed. She smiled. The crowd cheered. The operation was a total success! Once again the crowd went wild. New flashbulbs popped. The same women swooned. The same hats, if they could be found, were thrown even higher. The band burst into George Gershwin's *An American In Paris*.

The patient, now completely pain free, sat up. He blinked his eyes a few times, as if something strange might have just happened. And then he stood up. Since this was now the most magnificent fictitious operation in history, Jack began shaking hands with the entire team. All 128 of them were pleased as punch at having just performed the first televised miracle ever. They knew it would look good on their curriculum vitae.

The team then calmly stepped down from the operating theater of the amusing, discovered they were famous for 15 minutes, and so began signing autographs. When the 15 minutes were up, the crowd of two million dispersed in a few seconds, and all was quiet once again in Paris, the art, culture, and tall tale capitol of the world.

Other than that, things have been pretty normal this year. Hope the year behind you has been just as interesting. By the way, Jack hasn't had the operation yet, but everything before "It's not every day" is true. Just day dreaming. 😊

The patient is symbolic of any patient trying to recover. The team is Doctors Labat, Bensignor, Guerineau, and Robert, and their staff. This tremendously talented team represents any team or doctor who puts the patient's welfare far above their own.



All euro coins are the same on the front. The back is unique to each member of the European Union. Above is the back of a French two euro coin. Note the famous motto of France: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.