

What do bouldering gyms and hospitals have in common?

Many of us are familiar with the phrase “It’s all fun and games until someone gets hurt.”

I unfortunately learned the accuracy of this sentiment last week at my local bouldering gym.

I walked into Minneapolis Bouldering Project after a long week of going stir-crazy at home with the flu. Free from the metaphorical chains of my ailment, I rented some climbing shoes, powdered my hands with chalk and started my ascent up the bouldering wall.

My bouldering buddy and I struck gold at this gym just a couple weeks prior, when we got a month-long membership for the price of a day pass. The sport isn’t cheap, so this was truly the steal of a lifetime.

It’s important to clarify that while I enjoy bouldering and appreciate the benefits of a full-body exercise, it isn’t something I do often. I’ve been in what can only be referred to as an on-and-off relationship with it for the last five years.

For those who don’t know, the multicolored holds splayed across the gym walls indicate a route’s difficulty level. The most complicated bouldering grade I’ve personally conquered is a V4, identifiable at MBP by its purple coloring. The hold is considered intermediate to advanced, depending on who your source is.

Anna, my bouldering buddy with significantly better hand-eye coordination, and I had been climbing for no longer than 45 minutes when I decided to attempt a beginner route on the gym’s 17-foot center wall.

I watched four people successfully attempt



Natalie Trimble

Community Editor

Natalie Trimble is a community editor for the Sun Sailor. Reach her at natalie.trimble@apgecm.com.

the route before me and thought I’d have it in the bag.

Spoiler alert. I very much didn’t have it in the bag.

I was one away from the finish hold when I felt my arms shake. In the blink of an eye, gravity was pulling me toward the matted floor, giving me no time to brace for when I made contact with it. My feet touched the mat first. I then heard a “pop” and felt a sharp pain radiate through my right ankle.

I’m clutching onto my ankle in the fetal position and I beg Anna to retrieve ice packs from MBP staff. My ankle doubled in size within a matter of minutes, making it impossible to stand or walk on. It took one look at my ankle for a staff member to recommend that I go seek professional medical care immediately.

Embarrassed by the incident and wanting to play off the severity of my injury, I sucked in my tears, cracked a few jokes, and crawled as inconspicuously as possible to the nearest exit.

Anna loaded me into her car and piggybacked me through the emergency room doors at Abbott Northwestern Hospital. The swelling was so intense that my medical team thought the x-ray would reveal a broken fibula — the long, slender bone on the outer side of the lower leg

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Life at 65+ — men and retirement

When I have talked with men in their late 60s and 70s about their retirement, a common response has been that they planned well financially, and implied, without actually saying, that they did not prepare emotionally; i.e., “I wish I had known then, what I know now.”

They were hired for or started their own companies based on their expertise, talents and for many, their degrees. They focused on upward mobility, making money, a certain amount of risk and getting results, and they had a team to support their efforts. It gave them a reason to exist, to feel relevant and to have purpose. This had been their daily life for 40-50 years.

They looked forward to retirement when they could relax and enjoy their hobbies. What they discovered surprised them. When they were working, they had responsibility



Donna Bennett

Guest Columnist

Donna Bennett is a Minnetonka author and retired licensed psychologist. Reach her at db@donnambennett.com.

and challenges that helped them feel intellectually and emotionally engaged and satisfied. Following retirement, they often felt lost, as if they were just existing, and needed to be “refilled.” How did they make the shift?

Some still struggle with finding their way back to purpose. For them, they may receive some ideas from the variety of ways their counterparts have discovered to fill and contribute their time, use their skills and regain their sense of purpose. How? They volunteer to work on church task forces and committees, use their hands and creativity on

unique woodworking projects, build home ramps to help the disabled enter their homes, and remodel their own homes. Others continue to service previous clients or customers on an occasional basis and are available to assist children and grandchildren as needed.

Those who live in communities such as co-ops, or senior living facilities have discovered that socializing is helpful. They gather like-minded people to play pool, play card games such as cribbage and poker; they play golf, set up small financial groups, exercise, form breakfast groups or take part-time jobs in areas in which they have interest or want to use their skills.

One of the men in my research, now in his late 70s, maintained purpose by continuing to work past the typical retirement age. He lost his job in his late

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