

Retirement: Scarier Than Freddy Krueger

I'M used to horror. I'm the father of Freddy Krueger, for Pete's sake. But the horror of retirement? I didn't see that one coming at all.

I haven't actually retired, but my wife, Iya, would just as soon I did.

In the past three years we made two brutally difficult films back to back, with her producing and me directing, and we're both thoroughly wrung out. So retirement is tempting — in a way. Plus, our new house is nearing completion on Martha's Vineyard, a place that we knew, even if we didn't say it outright, we could make our final stand.

But that might be years from now. Or ... maybe sooner. I am 73, an age you see in obituaries a lot. Maybe it's just conductors who live into their 90s.

So Iya and I decided to take the summer off, move in to our cool new digs and forget the insanity of the film business. The plan was to relax, really relax, maybe for the first time in more than 40 years of filmmaking.

Iya seemed happier as soon as we resolved to do it, and "happy wife, happy life" is a mantra it seems unwise to ignore. Trial retirement made sense all around.

We started hanging out with everyone we knew but had never had time to hang out with before. Fun, interesting people, almost none of whom had seen a single movie I'd ever made. I built a woodworking shop in the basement. It was fun. Iya and I went for walks, read books, watched movies — we even had our kids and grandkids out for a week-long visit in August. It was wonderful. And we had the Vespa Iya had given me for my 70th birthday shipped out from California. Ah, tooling around the island on a Vespa. Perfection!

I used to ride a motorcycle in the '60s, so I was no stranger to two-wheeled transportation. But a scooter is a different animal. The Vespa manual strongly advised against off-road driving, but half the roads in the Vineyard are dirt. Soft sand, gravel, rocks — the kind of stuff the manual advises riders to avoid.

I was very cautious the day we took friends up to see the new house. Ten miles an hour on the Vespa, and doing just fine on the dirt road leading to our house. But suddenly the front wheel hit soft sand. The back end skidded off the road, throwing me sideways. Hanging on, I inadvertently gave it the gas. (Funny place for an accelerator — on the handlebars.) I took a quick glimpse at

the road's steeply rising shoulder and the boulder at its top. The next thing I remember was finding my face planted on the far side of the road. I was wearing a helmet and all that, so by the time Iya and our friends ran up, I was up and righting the scooter, feeling nothing more than embarrassment.

"I'm fine," I muttered. "No you're not!" Iya cried, pointing to the blood gushing from my cuff like rain from a downspout. I lifted my pant leg. And we all gasped: there was a gash the size of a coat pocket and something gray and gory sticking out from inside my leg. It looked like a shot in one of my movies.

Turns out, somewhere in those missing seconds the bike put its kickstand through my calf, splitting the muscle sheath. That's what was poking out. There was a good surgeon at the hospital, and after a rather intense session of stitching, he had me on my feet again. Or at least on crutches.

I asked him how many stitches, and he said he'd stopped counting after an hour.

Well, talk about tipping points. My retirement tipped me right over the cliff. And the left leg with all the stitches wasn't much good holding me up, which put a lot of strain on my right knee,

which was kind of in bad shape on its own. I'd been ignoring getting a torn meniscus fixed for years because, well, there was work to be had and I love to direct.

But since we were now retired, sort of, it seemed wise to have the knee

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checked out. Off to New York to the Hospital for Special Surgery. H.S.S. is a way cool place with some of the best doctors in the world for knee work, so what better place to have a meniscus trimmed? Except they took one look at my knee and said that though indeed I did have a "shredded" meniscus (their term), its repair wouldn't mean anything because the knee itself had gone to hell in a handbasket (my term). So, what to do? T.K.R., baby.

Total Knee Replacement. Check it out on YouTube. Interestingly, it's one subsection of drawing and quartering that has survived into the modern age. Before I knew it, I was walking around (on a walker) with a titanium and plastic knee, and another huge scar.

Now retirement meant being unable to walk better than Quasimodo, and feeling as if I'd been jumped by the Oakland Raiders twice, once for good measure.

I SETTLED down to watching movies, except the television was on the lower level of the house and one day I was carrying things in both hands going down the stairs when I slipped. Crash, right on my butt, then down to the bottom of the stairs like a crash test dummy. Back to H.S.S. Cracked pelvis. No use operating, just take it even easier. Unless you want hip replacement? No, thank you!

Now, 13 months later, I'm back on my own feet and ready to stop relaxing. It's too dangerous.

"Trial retirement" had a nice ring to it, but it ended up feeling like the Liberty Bell hit me in the head.

Give me the insanity of impossible schedules, screaming studio heads, script pages never showing up until the morning we're to shoot them — anything but the horrors of retirement. These are scarier than any horror movie I can dream up.



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