

Below is the message John sent to his Cooper Union college buddies on December 22nd after he returned from the hospital following an aortic valve replacement (12/14).  
New valve but same old sense of humor.

He is doing quite well at home and has foregone the intended use of his walker for its new use as the place to toss his sweatshirt at the side of the bed.

Happy New Year from Joni & John

To my many friends who have offered their kind wishes for a quick recovery - as well as to a few who might have only been marginally concerned,

Eight days have now elapsed since my carcass was placed on a gurney and wheeled to the operating theater. When I awoke at the address that would be my home for the next five days (Room 6, Cardio, ICU), I realized several things:

1. I was not dead yet.
2. I did not appear to have suffered a stroke since I could recall friends names and where I had left items on my bathroom shelf at home. (This was very comforting since I feared 'mushy brain' - or what I had dubbed, *brainianus* - more than any other outcome.)
3. I had no pain. (I decided that I was currently full of medications and that pain come later.)
4. I was tethered at every conceivable tethering point, rendering me - essentially - helpless. (For the next four days, this condition would teach me valuable lessons in vulnerability, dependency and tolerance - even as I was being treated like a king by a series of attendants known as *nurses*.)

For some reason, I first thought of identifying a *favorite* nurse among the dozen or so in attendance.

It turned out that they all became my favorites. Before you conclude that I am simply pandering, you might consider the following:

All the nurses were clearly compassionate and capable of fulfilling every function they were called upon to perform. Some moved purposely and silently so as to minimize the

impact of their presence. Others preferred to inform and involve the patient in as much activity as they were capable. (One of latter was a bustling, experienced nurse named "Angel.")

For a time, I thought Angel noted my poor hearing and spoke so that I could clearly hear and understand her instructions. Later, after hearing her interact at the nurse's station, I concluded that wasn't entirely the case. Throughout the night, the sound of her voice was comforting. Angel was on the job.

Most of the other nurses, male and female, were young. Some hoped to embark on matrimony soon; others are planning careers; their diversity - black, Asian, ... - in itself, was humbling. It seems hard to sustain bigotry against an array who labor to support you in your time of greatest vulnerability and need.

After five days, I was released back into the wild of Columbia, MO. This is not to suggest that my journey to heart health is over - but now I am free to go 'walkering' around my own home.

On weighing myself on my return, I was surprised to learn that I had ballooned 23 pounds during my hospital stay and resembled the Pillsbury Doughboy. At about a pound loss per day, it will be weeks before I am my old wrinkled self again.

A still more surprising surprise was that the anticipated pain had never arrived, unless one counts the burning sensation in the urethra from the removal of the catheter. (I do.)

Many of you will not understand what has led to my closing interpretation of this experience, but, still, I will try to put it into words. Some months ago, my Cooper colleagues weighed in on what, in their undergraduate experience, was most memorable and valuable. Some cited our backgrounds in math and physics; others, our introductions to art, music, and the humanities; ...

Perhaps oddly, I cited the graduation requirement that we learn how to swim. What occurred to me was that someone had decided that the young - and helpless - Cooper graduate should not be allowed to drown.

Again, thank you for your many kind wishes,

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