

I Didn't Know

Eileen Sperl-Hawkins

"I'm Dr. T. I will do your open heart surgery."

My eyes blink in rapid spurts. My husband exhales with a force that echoes in my ears.

"If I do it Thursday, I promise to have your three chest tubes out by Sunday."

My teeth dig into my lips; my head pressure focuses in my frontal sinuses.

"Let's hope the myxoma has not compromised your valve. If so, you should decide if you want a pig or cow..."

*I ask: "Open heart surgery? What's going to happen? How long will I be in the hospital?
We have a wedding in L.A. in mid-November. What's a myxoma?"*

"Well...you discuss those questions with Dr. S, your cardiologist. He'll let me know your decision. The myxoma could break off at any time; you must have it removed as soon as possible."

[Dr. T pauses.]

"I'll see you again before I operate."

My husband and I sit. He grabs my hand; he is squeezing it. I've no idea what is involved here.

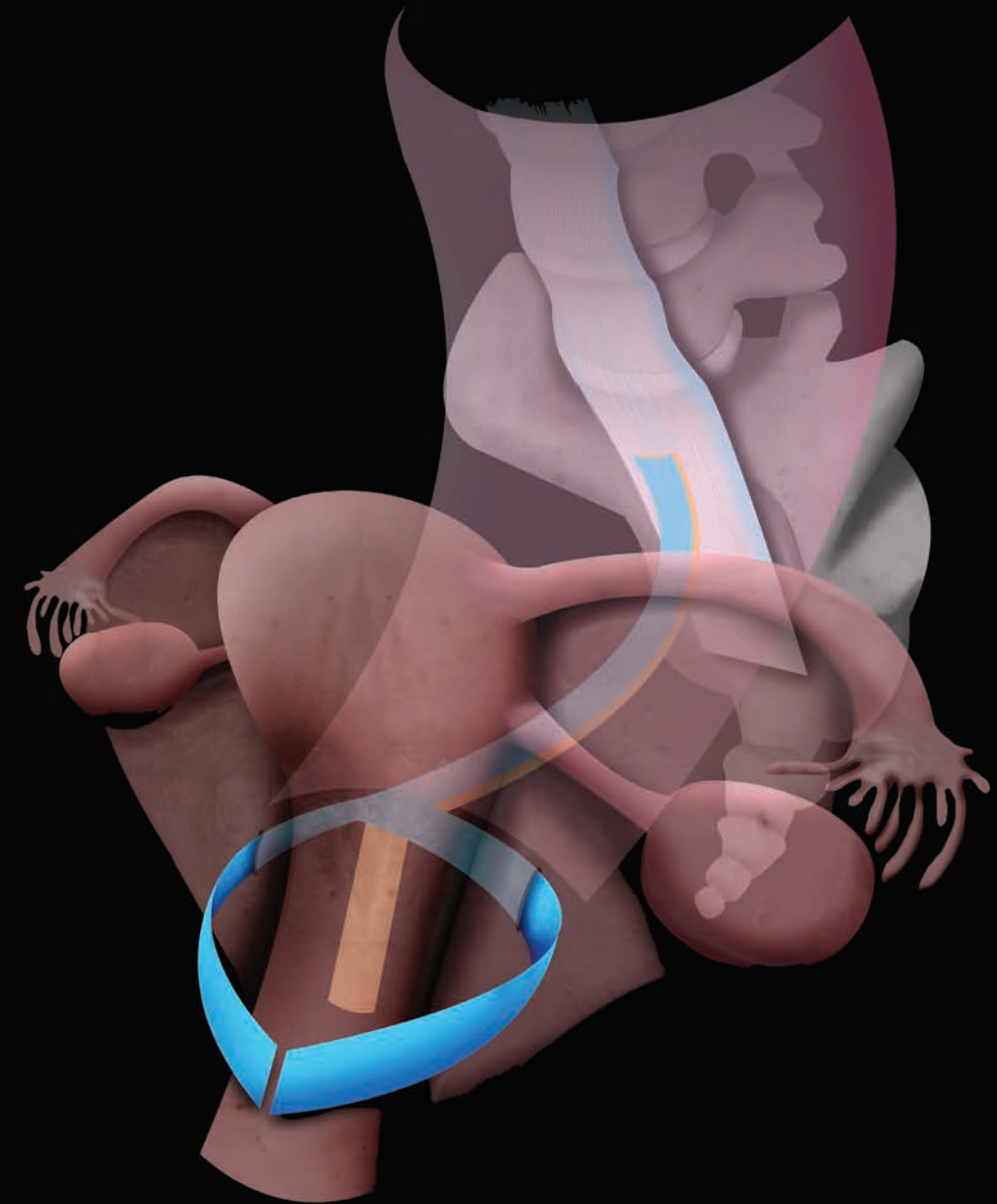
I didn't know my rib cage would be sawed open and that it would be wired shut.

I didn't know my myxoma (the floating vegetation attached inside of my heart) would be scooped out and the hole in my heart stitched closed.

I didn't know the myxoma would be the largest one Dr. S had ever seen.

I also didn't know that usually doctors only see myxomas in pathology reports after the patient has died.

■ "For more than seven years, I have chaired the Writers' Group at Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Florida State University. Poetic expression shapes my descriptions of daily encounters. Before moving to Tallahassee I worked for New York City lawyers, and educators, and with teenagers in Pennsylvania. Prior to the discovery of the myxoma inside my heart, my health was good. I volunteered in the community, in OLLI and at church. So I was a bit tired; I was almost sixty-five. Now I have published two poetry books, am exploring memoir and can be Googled. Life is marvelous."
—Eileen Sperl-Hawkins



Sacral Colpopexy
Zach Folzenlogen