



Stephen Axelrod

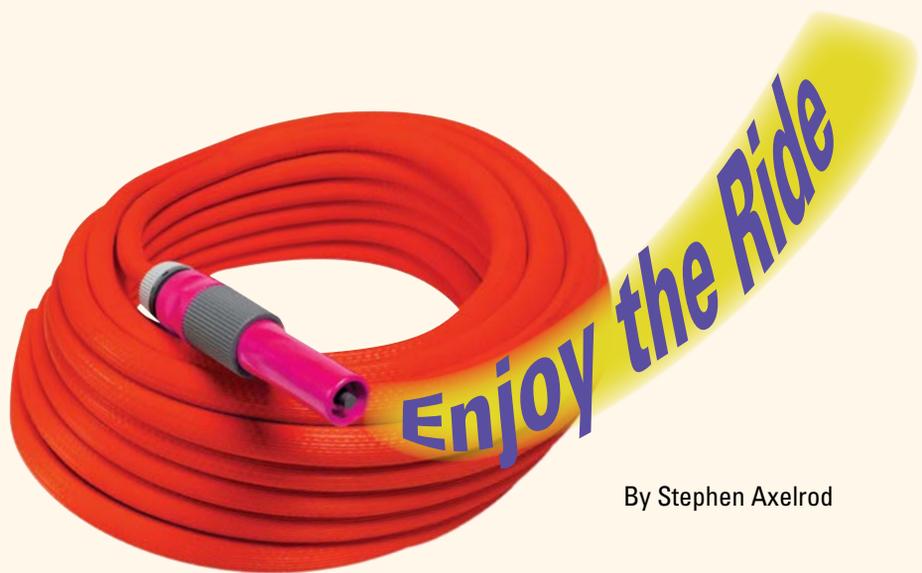
The thought of taking a colonoscopy filled me with terror. Jesus, what if they perforate my colon?

They nicked my friend Jim Muldoon last year and he nearly bled out and the dope was too stubborn to even let his wife know there was a problem until she found him sprawled out in a puddle of blood on the bathroom floor.

So, I decided to talk first with the head of the GI unit at the New York Veterans Hospital, Dr. Thompson. He looked like an old drug store cowboy, thinning gray hair pulled back into a nub of a ponytail. His fingers stained yellow from chain smoking cigarettes. His desk cluttered with papers and magazines.

"Well Mr. Axelrod," he said, "one in 1,000 may nick during the procedure. Remember, the test is invasive, accidents will happen."

"I wouldn't say one in 1,000 is exactly stellar odds doc."



By Stephen Axelrod

"Well son it's the best Uncle Sam has to offer, take it or leave. Now I have patients to see."

"One last question doctor, when was the last time you hopped up on a table and had 80 centimeters of hose shoved up your rectum?"

"As matter of fact wise guy I'm scheduled to be tested next Monday. Close the door on the way out," he snarled back.

Eight o'clock the following Friday I arrived at the GI unit. Nurse Frumkes was in charge.

"Mr. Axelrod find yourself an empty locker and hang up your clothes," she ordered. "There are booties and gown on the stool."

I insisted my Mets baseball cap stays on my head. If I should kick off during the test I need to know I was at least partially dressed.

"As you wish," she reluctantly responded.

When I was ready, Frumkes escorted me down a long corridor to the house of pain. Passing three guys in recovery, one of them in dreadlocks shouted, "dead man walking man."

Hop on the table Frumkes demanded, "Doctor Smirnov will be with you in a few minutes."

Ten minutes go by; 20 minutes no Smirnov and I'm waiting to be stuffed like a Christmas goose. Filled with anxiety, my imagination was on fire. What if the doctor is that wacked out hippy Thompson?

What if the hose gets stuck up there, then what? An operation, screw this. Wait a minute, Frumkes said Smirnov will be doing the procedure, not Thompson so relax.

Over my left shoulder I could see an open door that led into a slop room. Over the sink, hanging from the ceiling like salami in a kosher deli window, were six rubber hoses.

Frumkes entered the surgery with a needle in her hand. "I have your sedative here, Mr. Axelrod."

"No way, when I'm finished I'm out of here. No recovery room for me and please close that door behind me."

"You have to take the sedative," she insisted.

"Not in your life time, sweetheart."

"Good morning Mr. Axelrod, sorry I'm late. My last procedure took a bit longer than expected. I'm Dr. Smirnov...I'll be performing the procedure today."

"Why are you late, doc? Did you nick the guy's colon like my friend Muldoon? Is the patient going to make it, doc?"

"The patient is fine Mr. Axelrod. Relax, this is strictly routine. I've performed hundreds of colonoscopies."

Smirnov is about 30, 31. She's wearing black leather pants with a tight white ribbed blouse. Her black hair severely pulled back into a bun. She had a thick Russian accent.

"I understand you refused a sedative. May I ask why?"

"Let's just say I like to be in control," I responded.

"Control is an illusion Mr. Axelrod. Are any of us really in control? I think not. Besides it's very mild sedative."

"It's not happening doc."

"Well this is unusual but if you insist."

"I'll tell you what doc if the pain becomes intolerable, I'll raise my hand and you can hit me with the needle, deal?"

"Deal," she responded.

"Doctor could you please close the door behind me. It's freaking me out."

"Of course, sorry, okay let's get started. First I need you to roll over on to your left side and pull your knees up."

"I have positional vertigo, laying on my left side makes me dizzy."

Smirnov looked perplexed. It makes me nervous when doctors get that unsure look on their faces as if entering uncharted waters.

"Well the right side isn't anatomically correct for this procedure. Try lying on your back."

"That works, doc." At this point, all I could think about was her getting on top of me. She darned a translucent plastic apron and goggles.

"Okay Mr. Axelrod, raise and spread your legs, relax and breathe."

I don't know if she's aware of it but she's rubbing her hip against my shoulder all the while setting the nozzle of the air tank, like a welder preparing to strike a match. She grabs the hose and gently inserts into my rectum.

Frumkes is adjusting the picture of the overhead television which was practically in my face. Up comes a picture of my colon in color no less. All I can see is a wet pulsating labyrinth.

"Whoa...what the hell was that doc?"

"I just gave you a blast of air to open the colon. I must say you did a splendid prep job last night, Your colon is spotless."

"When was the last time you hopped up on a table and had 80 cm of hose shoved up your rectum?"

"Yea sure. You could practically eat off it, right doc?"

"That's funny Mr. Axelrod. You're doing fine...amazingly so. We're coming up on the first turn. You're going to feel a bit of pressure."

Pressure? I felt like I was giving birth to a baby grand piano. She's manipulating that hose back and forth trying to make the next turn and I'm thinking this may be the time to raise my hand for the spike. No way. I'm a Marine. I can take whatever she dishes out.

"This has to be uncomfortable for you Mr. Axelrod."

"I'm fiiiine doctor!!!"

"Mr. Axelrod, if you need to release air... do so." Smirnov said.

Is she crazy? There isn't any room to release air and besides there's no way I'm going to cut wind in front of a hot lady.

"Doctor Smirnov may I ask you a question?"

"Are you KGB trained?"

"You're a comic? I like a good sense of humor. You know Mr. Axelrod you could have avoided all this with a small sedative?"

Oh no. Willie Nelson just entered the surgery.

"How's our patient doing Doctor Smirnov?"

She pointed to the television set, "Very well Dr. Thompson. We do have a tight spot? Right there. The last two centimeters."

"Well perhaps if he had taken the sedative, his colon would be more relaxed and we wouldn't have this problem, would we Mr. Axelrod?"

"Doctor Thompson I have no doubt about that," I curtly responded and threw him the peace sign.

"Keep drilling Doctor Smirnov.

I want this test completed. In the meantime enjoy the ride Mr. Axelrod."

Smirnov was guiding that hose like a pilot trying to find the runway without light.

A few minutes later, she punched through. "Mr. Axelrod everything looks good, no polyps, everything is clean, no follow-up, will see you in five years. Take your time getting up."

"Actually you just met my husband."

"Willie Nelson is your husband?"

"Affirmative," she laughed.