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## Thanks for the Muscle Memory

Jerry Zezima

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# Thanks for the Muscle Memory

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Sunday April 7, 2024

By Jerry Zezima

I have always believed that exercise and health food will kill you. This explains why I live in deathly fear of broccoli and don't do anything more strenuous than getting up twice a night to go to the bathroom.

But now that I have reached the ripe old age of 70, and at the urging of my doctor, who takes my health to heart, I have returned to the gym for the first time in more than six months.

"It's been 193 days," team member Kenzie Evans said after I scanned my card at the front desk and told her I hadn't been there in a while.

"I was in jail for sticking up a gym," I said.

Kenzie blanched.

"Not really," I assured her. "I've just been lazy. But I recently turned the big 7-Oh and figured it was time to come back."

"Wow!" exclaimed Kenzie, who's 19. "You look good — for your age."

"Looks can be deceiving," I replied. "But thanks."

"Don't feel guilty about being away for so long," Kenzie said. "There was a guy who hadn't been back for a thousand days."

"That's two years and nine months," I calculated. "He must have been in pretty bad shape."

"I think that's why he returned," Kenzie said. "We kept his membership open."

"And he was paying for it," I said.

"Yeah, it's crazy," said Kenzie. "You might as well burn your money."

"But it's better to burn calories, right?" I said.

"Exactly," said Kenzie's boyfriend, Joe Dramis, who also works at the desk.

"Is it true," I asked Joe, who's 20, "that muscles have memory?"

"Yes," he answered.

"It's amazing," I said. "I can't remember what I had for lunch. My muscles have a better memory than my brain."

"You can go on a long streak of no workouts, then go back to exercising every day," Joe said. "Your muscles remember what your body went through."

"My body went through the wringer," I remembered. "It's a good thing the wringer isn't part of the exercise equipment."

"All our equipment is on the floor," said Joe.

"I don't want to end up on the floor myself," I remarked.

“You won’t,” promised Billy Beimann, another employee. “You just have to pick an exercise routine and start by going slow.”

Billy, 24, said he used to weigh 400 pounds.

“I’m down to 250,” he added. “I like to think most of it is muscle. But I started coming to the gym a year and a half ago. I lost a lot of weight and now I feel great.”

“Hey, that rhymes!” I exclaimed.

When he asked what my goal was in coming to the gym, I said, “I don’t want to leave in the back of an ambulance.”

“That’s a good plan,” he said.

“I want to do cardio exercises,” I told Billy.

“The stationary bike is good for that,” he said.

“I wouldn’t be going anywhere,” I noted.

“True,” Billy said. “But you won’t be in traffic, either.”

He added that weightlifting also is good for the heart.

“So is red wine,” I said.

“I had a rotator cuff problem and weight exercises really helped,” he said.

“Didn’t rotator cuffs used to be in cars?” I wondered.

Billy took me over to the weight area and asked, “Do you want to start with barbells or dumbbells?”

“I’m a dumbbell,” I said. “So let’s do barbells.”

I lifted the lightest one, 20 pounds, and got limbered up. Then I spent a few minutes on a bike. I barely broke a sweat.

“I started slowly,” I told Billy, Joe and Kenzie as I was leaving.

“Bye,” said Billy.

“We’ll see you soon,” Joe said.

—Jerry Zezima

Jerry Zezima writes a humor column for Tribune News Service, which distributes it to newspapers nationwide and abroad. He is also the author of seven books, *Leave It to Boomer*, *The Empty Nest Chronicles*, *Grandfather Knows Best*, *Nini and Poppie's Excellent Adventures*, *Every Day Is Saturday*, *One for the Ageless* and his latest, *The Good Humor Man: Tales of Life, Laughter and, for Dessert, Ice Cream*, all of which are "crimes against literature." He has won eight awards from the National Society of Newspaper Columnists for his humorous writing.