

*Dr. Robert J. Rowen's*

SECOND OPINION

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[This Chinese Herbal Formula Controls Inflammation Better Than Steroids](#)

[Popular Pain Medications Cause Heart Disease](#)

[Reduce Your Risk of Contracting Lou Gehrig's Disease by 60%](#)

[Another Fun Adventure](#)

[Miracles of Medicine](#)

[Health Notes](#)

[Letters](#)

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Another Fun Adventure

I've gotten so much delightful feedback on the story of my adventure last year with ophthalmologist Ed [Kondrot](#) that I want to tell you about this year's trip. You might remember that we trekked into and out the Grand Canyon on the hottest weekend of the year. This year Ed and I trekked Yosemite, a trip I've yearned to do since my San Francisco Medical School days. This was another great adventure!

Remember, last year, my parents were worried that I, as a virtual vegan, would collapse on the trail from protein malnutrition. This year, they didn't mention my diet at all. They were more concerned about bears. But Ed promised them that he would protect me with his "piece." That settled them down.

Ed and I started out at a very high 8,700 feet elevation at Tuolumne Meadows near the Sierra crest. We both carried 45-pound packs overstuffed with enough food to last a week. We got to the trailhead late on July 1, the start of the busiest weekend of the year.

The first challenge was dealing with high melt water from record snowfall. The rivers and creeks were raging. I wish my mom could have seen us at the first creek. It required us to cross on a fallen tree, perilously balancing the 45-pound packs on our backs, with frigid water below. But we both made it without any trouble.

We stopped to camp before sundown in a majestic valley rimmed by snow-covered peaks. It was more beautiful than any picture could capture. The next day, everything changed.

We got to the end of the dreamy valley and then had to begin an incredibly steep climb – to 10,400 feet. Within just the first hour of the climb, we encountered at least four parties of people half our age that had turned around and descended. They told us tales of incredible amounts of hard-to-traverse, snow-obliterated trails. But we decided to give it a try.

At about 9,600 feet, we did encounter snow. In fact, the snow pack became so deep that the trail disappeared. We were able to detect faint footprints in the melting snowfields and followed them until the snow broke and revealed the trail. Then countless more times, the snow pack alternated with trail. We reached our goal for that night at about 10,300 feet, thankfully on a high dry spot.

The next day, we intended to explore a lake. But the entrance trail was completely buried in

three to four feet of snow. This, on July 4 weekend! We gave up on this side trip and continued on. The mosquitoes were as bad as in Alaska!

The trail was completely covered by massive fields of snow. It was more like trekking a glacier. Ed comes from Phoenix. This was his first encounter with snow for the year, and his first ever walking over such conditions. I was in the lead and carefully scanned for footprints of those we knew successfully passed through.

We intended to camp at Evelyn Lake. The lake was still ice covered except for its perimeter. The shore was barren and there was no protection from the cool wind. Not an ideal place to camp. However, Ed offered me a dollar to go skinny-dipping up to my neck in the ice water. I demanded \$20. He agreed (forgetting I'm Alaskan). I splashed in. Yelling to offset the cold, I did the deed, got photographed with just my head showing for proof, and ran out. I sensed Ed felt a bit outdone. I offered him his \$20 back if he would do the same. I knew he just had to match me. So he stripped, marched in, got photographed, and came out semi-solid. We were even. We loaded up and continued to more favorable grounds.

After we selected a campsite, I noticed a stream that was naturally dammed. It left a very shallow pool of water fully exposed to the high altitude sun. "That's our hot spring," I said. Indeed, the water was bath warm, even with snow all around. It was sheer pleasure.

The fourth day was an easy descent from 10,000 feet back to the trailhead. We covered 20 miles over four days. Both our faces were sunburned from the reflected glare (despite a wide rim hat). But no bear encounters (whew!).

At the trailhead, we called my folks to tell them that I was hospitalized and Ed was jailed for shooting a park bear, saving me from the attack. They laughed, knowing better.

Ed and I accomplished another trip of our dreams. The lesson here is that you, too, can fulfill your dreams as well. Care for and push your body to, but not beyond, its limit. Walking a half mile can mean as much to you if you're 80, as 20 miles did for us.

Prevent degeneration of your body with a healthy diet and exercise. It's not important how long you live. It's more important how you live. I devote my diet and lifestyle to protecting my body's ability to do things like this until I'm ready to depart this world. Next year, I'll bring you another true tale of what two near seniors (both 56 years young) are capable of doing!

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