

Fearful Final: Deborah Singerman

It was World Pride in Sydney, a throbbing February, sunny and full of people with T-shirts promising fun and fury. I have not gone to evening cultural performances for years, and certainly no wham-bam parties where sparkle earns you searing nocturnal stares.

So, I enjoyed day-time harmonies from visiting choirs at shopping centres and libraries, films from anywhere and everywhere, and sessions at the global human rights conference.

Nevertheless, I could not resist the throbbing music and community colour-splash of Hyde Park and Oxford Street on the last day. Even the fast-food joints bopped with trim men and women twirling scarves and laughing a hell-bent joy.

But I was drained and scorched by the sun and the next day, walking to my local station, I remember looking at a hump in the road and thinking, 'I am not going to make this'.

I did not and opened my eyes to the concerned face of an ambulance driver. I had collapsed on the pavement and was rushed to emergency. The hospital report frustratingly said only that I had been found by a passerby. Thank you kindly.

I have had type 2 diabetes and hypertension for years, with weakening muscles and a stoop from osteoporosis. An endocrinologist eventually diagnosed them holistically as Cushing's disease.

A brain surgeon removed a tumour on my pituitary gland, a classic Cushing's operation. But my muscles continued to weaken, despite a good diet and daily walks. I was slow and unsteady.

I had fallen before but the Pride fall shook me so much I agreed to laparoscopic surgery to remove my adrenal glands. These generate cortisol stress hormones, which we need to stay alive, but in the numbers I had (and probably had had for many, undetected years) can turn sour.

Since the operation, I am stronger, less stooped, and can open jam jars, without a towel to aid turning. This is one of the rewards for the tiny scars and lumps that line my stomach.

I clutch handrails at stations, hauling myself up and down, concentrating hard on keeping a steady line so people do not nudge me.

My legs vary every day; how stiff, how tingly, pins and needles crawling inside my limbs. I take life-giving steroids monitored by my endocrinologist.

I am learning how far and how fast I can walk to keep my fearful heart from pumping loudly in anticipation of another fall.