



## Floating in an MRI

by Ken Bandler

Sensing horizontal movement, my eyes slowly opened to view a young man in white asking if I was okay. Stretched out on a shelf that had transported me out of an MRI machine, I realized that I actually had slept for the past hour. Without hesitation, I asked if he could send me back in to continue my slumber.

Anyone who has undergone the MRI experience might be just as surprised as the hospital

radiology team was. MRI exams produce effective results without side effects, but it is one of the noisiest medical devices in use.

My first MRI journey was prescribed by a neurologist who suspected I might have MS. Several months earlier I'd undergone an array of other tests, but MS can be challenging to pinpoint and this remarkable technology has become an important tool in the diagnostic process. When my symptoms returned, I was not sure why my doctor needed an MRI, but the thought of a noninvasive examination to determine what was happening was welcome.

Entering the MRI for the first time was terrifying. I arrived at the hospital an hour early to complete detailed

forms and answer questions about metal in my body. Okay, I don't have a pacemaker, but does that gold filling in one of my teeth count?

After putting on a hospital robe, the technicians asked several more times about metal. My wedding band was ruled okay.

All the questions about claustrophobia failed to register on me until I was already lying face-up on the shelf. A frame was placed over my head to ensure immobility. Any movement can distort the image, so stillness is imperative, and the medical team reminded me of that critical factor repeatedly before and during the exam. Finally, I was given an emergency button, just in case I needed assistance and couldn't be heard over the din.

The shelf moved slowly, taking me in head first. I looked upward,

Two people who've lived with MS for many years talk about what it's like to go through these important but less-than-pleasant tests. MRI, first, is a common tool to help establish an MS diagnosis and sometimes monitor treatment.

Triptych: "Escape," oil and acrylic on canvas, 3.75' x 11.25'



## Brett Weber's art

"I have always admired Leonardo da Vinci," Brett Weber told *Momentum*. "He experimented in both art and science, and experienced his share of success and failure.

"As a scientist, I have been interested in the visual system and how the brain processes visual information. I have also studied nerve regeneration. Ironically, the week before completing my PhD in neuroscience, I was diagnosed with MS.

"There is a sharp distinction between art and science, and studying a disease through art is not the same as studying it through science. My art is about my own emotional, intellectual, and spiritual journey."

Allentown, Pennsylvania, painter and MS activist Brett Weber received a B.A. in Fine Art-Painting and a B.S. in Biology from Moravian College in Bethlehem before working on his PhD in neuroscience at Temple University in Philadelphia. His art has been included in numerous shows in New York, Philadelphia, Denver, and the Lehigh Valley, and in Greece.

See more of Brett Weber's art at [brokenartgallery.com](http://brokenartgallery.com).

to the right and left, and realized the ceiling of the tube was only inches above my nose. "Maybe I should press that button now," I thought. A technician's voice was heard—a final check and I affirmed that all was OK.

Then it began. The pattern of banging started slowly, then came with more rapidity, with different levels of noise, alternating in frequency. It continued for about 30 minutes and, after a short break, another round. Again I was tempted to press the button, but the thought of having to do this over again was even worse. Hopefully, I thought, this would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

That exam confirmed MS, and, thankfully, my doctor didn't recommend another one, not until my symptoms changed a dozen years later. When I returned to the facility, the doc-

tors proudly informed me that the technology had advanced. But it was now even noisier. They handed me earplugs that had limited effect.

Comparing the old and new films, the doctors concluded that the disease had progressed. Determining the best treatment to contain further progression meant that annual MRIs—more frequently if necessary—would henceforth be part of my life.

I am now accustomed to the routine, but one never can be fully comfortable inside the tube. To avoid claustrophobia, I shut my eyes soon after entering. It's important to think relaxing thoughts, not consider matters that can add to stress. I now schedule MRIs in the late afternoon or early evening, when it can be easier to disengage from the demands of work.

So why did I fall asleep? Well, notwithstanding the noise and claustrophobia, for a full hour I had been completely unreachable. No cell phones, no BlackBerry. Even if someone had located me, I could not be interrupted. How much more relaxing could it be after a highly stressful week?

After five MRIs, I have enormous admiration for the machine, and am intrigued by viewing the images with my doctors as they explain what is happening inside me. I often wonder what it was like not so long ago without this technology—and I almost look forward to my next escape journey inside the MRI.

Ken Bandler is a public relations executive in New York City.

*Ken's ability to relax while having an MRI is rare. Many people are more comfortable taking relaxation medication prior to the procedure.* —The Editor