

Journey of a Wounded Healer

Brian Allan Skinner

3. Bees Attracted to Vinegar

14 July 2014

It became enticing to feel sorry for myself, being half paralyzed and unable to care for myself. What else was there to do or to occupy my mind with? It was also tempting to envy all the hospital staff and the stream of visitors because they were all ambulatory. But I also know that each of us has his or her path to follow and none are easy. Some can only trudge through life and some burdens seem beyond their bearer's capacity to carry. So I turned away from these thoughts as quickly as I could and instead did a mental calculation of all the things for which I was grateful. Once in that more peaceful realm, I could consider how fortunate I was.

There were others in my room who were similarly confined in their bodies and some in confused mental states as well. When asked when I was last hospitalized, I replied, "Sixty-five years ago when I was born. How lucky is that?" Many to whom I gave that honest response blinked in disbelief. What, I thought, did I really have to complain about? My body was simply making up for lost time and I was doing all my hospital stays at once.

A fellow patient in the four-bed room was a constant and angry complainer who even made threats of legal action that impressed no one. He didn't like the bed, the food, the doctors, the nurses, or the hospital staff taking care of him. I listened to his litany of woes and thought that there must have been something that was all right, but there wasn't. No matter was too trivial for him to refrain from complaining about it.

I watched as he was habitually the last on the list of our daily routines: he was last when the food was brought even though his bed was closest to the door. I don't believe he was being in any way mistreated, but this squeaky hinge was oiled only when necessary and then only reluctantly. I doubt there was any conscious conspiracy against this fellow by the nurses and other attendants. It seemed to me he had simply not learned one of the elementary laws of nature—of human nature, at least: that few bees are attracted to vinegar.

Perhaps the hospital had been built and staffed solely for his care and comfort, as his attitude suggested, but I didn't think so. His name did not appear on a single dedicatory brass wall plaque anywhere in this wing of the hospital.

P.S. When I was asked the standard neurological questions to make sure I was not having a recurrence of the stroke—name, date, location, president, etc.—I decided to answer that it was Bastille Day. The alarmed nurse questioned me further and, when I had decided that I did not want to be moved to the psych unit, I told her it was July fourteenth. Being right doesn't guarantee you won't be considered crazy.