

Journey of a Wounded Healer

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8. *Bien con Bien Se Paga*

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My trust in the fact that I would reach help, that I would be taken care of by the Higher Power of my understanding never wavered for a moment. I was not concerned. I realized that I needed only to align myself with the Power for Good and I would not only survive but thrive once again. This has been the course of my recovery for the past month. I am in an environment that promotes health and healing, and everyone I encounter, from the doctors and technicians to the cooks and the woman who changes my bed linens (Claudette from Jamaica), have only my welfare in mind. I have only to accept their love and care with gratitude and follow their advice to the best of my ability. It was a tall order, but every smile, thank-you, and joke was reciprocated. I made a point to remember everyone's name, including the tongue-twisters and the people I saw only infrequently. *Bien con bien se paga*.

Not once did I fail to receive the same attention in return. Not once was my request denied or forgotten. Like begat like and I made friends quickly, even among those whose mien seemed aloof or surly. The slightest compliment bore an abundance of good humor. I especially liked the multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-ages of the staff and patients. It felt like home; it felt safe.

My first roommate sorely tested my equanimity. He and his entire family were rude, crude, loud, and overbearing. I left the room whenever they visited, lest my patience be frayed to the snapping point. A group would visit my roommate and spend hardly a minute talking to him—or even to each other. They brought out their phones and all but shouted over one another and the ever-glowing television to carry on conversations with people not in the room. Every utterance was banal, hardly worth the breath. Even their various ringtones were obtrusive and obnoxious.

They brought containers of food for the patient that were a list of every substance he was not supposed to ingest except—as far as I knew—for alcohol. It raised his glucose level and blood pressure and caused him to be incontinent. I surmised they wanted their inheritance sooner rather than in the natural course. My roommate claimed to be constantly in pain and took as much Oxycontin, Vicodin, Tramadol, and morphine as the doctors permitted him. He slept through most of the day, often skipping therapy, and lay awake for most of the night watching insipid re-runs at high volume. He was uncooperative and delusional and complained about everything and everyone. What was worse is that the man's wife and son bought into his delusions. They balled out the staff over his not being fed or attended to and believed that persons unknown were injecting strange drugs into his IV at night.

I handled their uproar by leaving when I could and when not, I obtained earplugs from one of the nurses. It was easier to plug two ears than to get a roomful of morons—in the best sense of the word—to keep it down and be courteous to others. To them, there were no others.

This one person, a nice enough fellow on his own most of the time, tested me sorely and did all in his power to get me to lose my temper and fire with both barrels. But I had better, calmer influences that outnumbered him and his tribe. I held my tongue and kept my patience. He proved it was possible to shun everything that was offered to help one get better. He seemed not to want to get better.

I prayed for him, especially since he would soon be imprisoned among his toxic relatives with no hope of parole except landing in the hospital again. His family seemed adept at enabling him. This was his third prolonged hospital stay of the year and August had only begun. I didn't doubt it was his only way of escaping his toxic tribe short of a final departure.

My roommate, 78 years old, was also on nicotine patches because, up to the moment he was admitted to the hospital, he still smoked. Everyone in his family that I met was a smoker. They brought their tobacco aroma in their clothes and hair and breath. The women had deep, husky voices. The poor patient had been twice weaned off tobacco during his two previous stays, only to resume the habit upon his release, likely within the hour. He was given nicotine patches to diminish his craving since smoking was not permitted anywhere on hospital property.

I congratulated my roommate on overcoming his nicotine habit even if it had not been voluntary. The physical addiction is broken after thirty days. He told me he would likely take up smoking again once he went home. One of his daughters, in fact, had bought him a carton of his favorite brand and promised it would be waiting for him when he got home. Ignorance, I'm afraid, often proves invincible.

I pray for Donald and his family, who certainly deserve each other.