

## Journey of a Wounded Healer

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### 20. The Fledgling

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With only a week to go before my expected release from the rehabilitation center, I was already glumly anticipating the leave-taking I would have to do. I have never been very good at saying good-bye, and I knew this situation was going to be especially difficult. I had been airlifted here in a broken body, a grown man in an infant's body who could not do the simplest things for himself. These people, the nurses and therapists, took care of me the way parents coddle a young child. They fed me, bathed me, wiped my butt, and tucked me in at night. The therapists held onto me as I took my first steps and encouraged me when I learned how to put round pegs in round holes and to retrieve baubles and beads from a wad of putty. They could not have been more concerned or caring if they had, in fact, been my parents. But as with any fledgling, part of my education—or in this case my re-education—is a preparation for my leaving the nest.

I observed over the course of the past five weeks that the nurses, nurse assistants, therapists, therapy volunteers, food servers, and all the other helpers and attendants seemed to have the right jobs. They took joy in their work and did it well. Their dedication infused the air I breathed, and I was relaxed and comfortable among them. They provided a milieu that was healing and loving. No doubt they had off days, but I did not witness a single one. The crankiness and acrimony came from my fellow patients, some of whom regarded our care-givers as their personal servants to whom they spoke in tones not even worthy for the family dog. I excused them by reminding myself that they were also sick and hurting.

I honestly felt as though I were spending the summer in a vacation rental with friends. Everyone had his or her assigned duties, each done to the best of their abilities. This put most patients at ease and left plenty of room for fun and laughter and jovial kidding, in which I also indulged. Laughter, after all, is one of the most effective therapies.

Now the time is approaching for me to leave this comfy nest and to attempt flight with these damaged wings. I had already asked my partner to bring me extra handkerchiefs because I know how I will react to leaving in advance. I hoped the good-byes will be more in the nature of *au revoir* and *auf Wiedersehen* and even *vaya con Dios*, but I suspect that some will indeed be farewells. I have promised myself that I will return some months hence to show them the man I have become under their tutelage. I will remain forever grateful and in their debt for all they have taught me about healing. It is a skill, a calling I intend to keep by giving it away at every opportunity.