

The Involuntary, but Grateful Changeling

by Deborah Paul

My husband Jim told everyone around the Christmas Eve dinner he was thankful for the change in me this year.

I'm not sure what he was talking about exactly, but I do know after one hip replacement and two knee replacements within 15 months, my perspective on health, family, good friends and strangers has truly taken on new meaning. I hope to carry this perspective into the new year and beyond.

I'm severely allergic to pain medications needed to bend limbs into working condition. My Jim took care of me through every meal, exercise, bed change, soiled clothes and patted my back as I spontaneously wretched for more than two months after each surgery. I couldn't take the usual pain meds because of a kidney problem which snuck up on me. And I'm too vain to limp.

When the organ hitch arose, my younger sister Sandy said she would donate a kidney to me if it came to that. No questions, no theatrics, she would give one of her organs just because she loves me.

Fortunately, the kidney isn't a real problem unless I thrive on meat and cheese.

Still Sandy's offer was heartfelt and serious, so I'm easily moved to tears when I think about her generous offer.

Come to think of it, I'm moved to tears for just about everything, anymore. In between sick days during recovery, the narcotics made me taste and see everything 10 times brighter, happier, sadder, and perhaps drew me closer to my faith because of the devastating cruelty unveiled in world news.

I now understand how the raggedy person talking to themselves on the streets got hooked on drugs. I've found narcotic medications do two things. They certainly quell the throbbing in the lesion areas, but the Norco also demanded I take another pill after six hours to get rid of the ebbie-jeebies under my skin. It's a nasty feeling.

On Christmas Day, my sister Kathy and I had to buy some plastic containers for our give-away soup. Coming toward our car, was a man whose hair was eerily sticking up all over. He carried a dirty backpack and walked like a person headed for the gallows. Kathy rolled her window down as he passed. We asked him if he could use a roll of quarters.

The man looked into each of our eyes and said, "That's really nice of you, but I have everything I need, Merry Christmas," and continued on.

Of course that made me cry. God tells us to be kind to strangers because we might be entertaining angels unaware. Maybe he was an angel, maybe he wasn't, but we're glad he was present in his mind enough to express a bittersweet goodness.

Now free from the opiate and all its accomplices -- you knee replacement survivors know what I'm talking about -- I'm deeply thankful for all the kindness bestowed on me from my family and friends.

And, I'm hugging my husband more.

I've grown to REALLY appreciate what he can do on a daily basis. He a loving father and grandfather, he can fix a roof leak, plumb water systems, cook and he's a loyal friend to his buddies, as well as an advocate for Middle East missionaries. He took care of me, and was still involved with these preoccupations when all I could do was walk around the backyard gasping for fresh air.

When I call him "my darling or my dear one" now, my love goes so deep for him, I could just burst. Yes, I've changed. Hopefully, to those I love now and will love in the future, it's a good change.

And here's another upside to all this presumed change: I've lost 14 pounds and will definitely not limp into 2016. Happy New Year and God bless us everyone.

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