

Protective Mechanism

Category: Showing Vulnerability

written by Marilyn Barton | September 10, 2019

Local EMS responded to the 911 call: "30-year old male who can't walk." Upon seeing his dire condition, they drove lights and sirens to the ER. I saw the paramedics wheeling their patient into Room 1 and thought the handsome, young man looked too healthy for the critical area. Was he a VIP patient expecting special treatment? I didn't know whether to be alarmed or annoyed. Then I lifted the sheet and couldn't palpate a post-tibial pulse. I ran to get the ER doctor.

"Sorry, you gotta come to #1 now."

"How bad?"

"Worst."

Together, Dr. Tish and I examined Mr. Watts' left leg, which was electric blue with a silvery hue, and ice cold from his groin to toes. No pulse, even with the ultrasonic doppler.

Just then, the admitting clerk pulled me aside, "He won't give me his Social (Social Security Number)."

Hmm. Why is he more concerned about that than his leg?

"I'll ask him why."

Mr. Watts blurted out, 'I'm here visiting from Montana. Five years ago, some jerk got my number, stole my identity, ruined everything.'

My guardian angel whispered: *His leg's dying, don't push it.* It was the mid-1990's, identity theft was not common in my area and wasn't a federal crime yet. But I knew that the wrong word or look from me could escalate Mr. Watts' agitated state.

I reassured him, "You don't have to. It's okay."

"Thanks, glad you get it."

I could tell Dr. Tish was worried. He was talking to Radiology and using the word "stat" the way they do on tv. Before I knew it, radiology techs came for Mr. Watts: "Our doctor's ready to go." Off they went to the Cardiac Cath Lab, and I never saw my patient again.

Fearing that Mr. Watts' leg had been amputated, I was pleased to hear that the interventional radiologist had been able to dissolve the big clot, and without complications.

Six months later, I was standing at the copy machine when a young woman approached asking for "a nurse named Marilyn." Cautiously, I said, "I'm Marilyn." She then smiled and relayed details about her friend from Montana, who was doing fine. He asked her to find me and say thanks for not making him give up his Social Security Number.

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