

# August More Voices: A Turn for the Better

Category: A Turn for the Better  
written by Paul Gross | August 1, 2024

Dear readers,

In old movies, a greying, bearded physician arrives in the middle of the night to tend to a desperately ill family member. If the film has a happy ending, the doctor emerges from the sick room a few scenes later to solemnly pronounce, "The fever has broken."

In my years as a physician, I would sometimes see those sudden turns for the better: A woman admitted to the hospital with a raging kidney infection responded to a few doses of antibiotic; a man with congestive heart failure whose shortness of breath went away after an intravenous infusion of a diuretic; a child who was happily eating breakfast two days after surgery for acute appendicitis.

It's wonderful to see symptoms resolve with a medical intervention. But in my experience, many turns for the better are more nuanced.

In my own case, type 1 diabetes had me losing weight, parched with thirst and urinating incessantly. Those symptoms improved once I started taking regular insulin doses, but I'd say my turn for the better began hours before, when I met the doctor who assumed my care. I started to feel better when he looked me in the eye and let me know that he was taking responsibility for getting me better. My road to recovery started there.

Turns for the better often take awhile—and may not be noticeable at first. A patient who used to miss appointments starts showing up more often. A patient whose blood pressure is out of control gradually starts taking their pills. A smoker decides to quit—not on the day I first recommended it, but two years later, on their own timetable.

Sometimes my relationship with a patient took a turn for the better: A woman's suspicious, resentful demeanor softened with time; my unflattering first impressions morphed into respect and appreciation of her courage.

I can think of a patient who was afraid to go outside. Afraid of what might trigger him. Afraid of the depths of his rage.

"If someone sets me off, I might do anything. Someone thinks I'll back down, but once I reach that point, I never back down. They don't know what I'm capable of."

Listening to him was scary.

And then, he started seeing a therapist.

Months later, I ran into him at a restaurant. He was a different man—more relaxed than I'd ever seen him. At ease. Smiling. He was in the midst of a turn for the better.

This month's *More Voices* theme is [A Turn for the Better](#). Tell us about your experience of taking a turn for the better, caring for someone who's taken a turn for the better, or about a turn for the better that never quite materialized.

Share your story using the [More Voices Submission Form](#). For more details, visit [More Voices FAQs](#). And have a look at last month's theme: [Trans](#).

Remember, your story should be 40-400 words. And no poetry, please.

We look forward to hearing from you!

With warm regards,

*Paul Gross*  
*Editor*