

Still Standing

Category: COVID Redux

written by Cynthia Stock | January 30, 2024

Just before I attended my writers' group meeting, I tested myself for COVID. I'd been congested and coughing, but I was negative. Even so, my husband slept in the spare bedroom that night because of my cough.

The next day, I got up as usual. In the bathroom, I noticed my forearms were tingling—not unexpected for someone like me who has MS, but the location was new and the sensation a tickle rather than the typical burning. I felt different, too, so I checked my blood pressure. It was low, even for me. I shrugged it off. Typical nurse.

I headed for the kitchen and coffee. I will never know if I fell between steps or between breaths. I awakened for the second time, on the floor, my pajama bottoms wet from incontinence, my body chilled. I called for my husband. My voice came out a whisper. I tried to sit up. Dizziness and nausea made me lie right back down again. It took three tries before my husband heard me. "I fainted," I said. "Call 911. I can't even sit up." A retired ICU nurse asking for an ambulance? He knew I was in trouble.

Not long afterward, the gurney rumbled over the doorsill. I opened my eyes to several pairs of black shoes and dark blue slacks. A male voice referred to me as "Darlin'." In 40 years of nursing, no patient ever got away with calling me that, but now I said nothing. Strange hands lifted me onto the gurney and pushed the gurney outside. I heard the click of its metal joints. The same hands hoisted the gurney and slid me into the ambulance. I opened my eyes once or twice, then surrendered.

At the hospital, I tested positive for COVID and was rushed for a CT scan. When I fainted, I'd hit my head on the metal base of a floor lamp.

What do I remember about COVID? I remember the loneliness of being in the hospital because of visiting restrictions, the disappointment when only one nurse listened to my breath sounds in 48 hours, the fear incited by the sight of tears in the eyes of my burly, 41-year-old son, the relief of my headache five minutes after the remdesivir hit my vein, and the elation when the doctor said she would write my discharge orders.

My COVID experience left me with benign paroxysmal positional vertigo. It aggravated old nerve damage from my MS. It made me confront my mortality.

It also made me grateful: I am still standing.

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