

Never Read Your AVN*

Category: Regrets/No Regrets

written by Sarah Liu | June 24, 2024

An early morning Zoom class, "Dealing with the Inner Critic," to return my brain to a poetic rather than medical mode. I have several projects simmering, some raw, others partly cooked, but none completely finished, ready for consumption.

Transfer to Palliative Care: an acknowledgement of the incurable. The promise "we'll make you as comfortable as possible" with the unspoken mutual understanding "until you die." Resulting in life more as a patient, swamped with medical appointments, social care bureaucracy, inscrutable insurance codes, and pharmacy regulations. Less time to finish my incomplete sentences.

My Inner Critic: desire for perfection, *le mot juste*. The muse has flown, leaving flat, lifeless blah blah, a slight shadow cast by gray shades of brain imaging, casting a tumor over my thoughts. You could write before, but now your brain has lost whatever spark those neurons had.

My AVNs report my waning energy, any mistakes I make in language or slowdown in speech, marks of neurodegeneration. Accessing these records, I internalize them, even when noting mistakes the doctors make, describing my doctorate as a "PhD in Philosophy," when the specialists have the given me the wrong specialty.

Neurodegeneration or simply a tired brain that rebounds after a bit of rest? After an exhausting day, I futz up an email. Dementia? No. I know myself better than that. Better than... Yes, a PhD means not that kind of doctor, in this case, not so bad. Writer's block not from perfectionism but acceptance of a diagnostic term. My own medical humor has come back to haunt me: the eponymous FUB (F•••ed Up Brain) no longer metaphorical but literal.

One of my favorite childhood books: *The Little Engine That Could*. I think I can, I think I can...and it does.

Those mistakes, those verbal flubs. Imperfection by other people's standards. Your brain isn't damaged beyond belief. You can do it, if you "make yourself as comfortable as possible." Not the end yet. Just don't take AVN presumptions as the final word.

Sarah Liu
Berkeley, California

*After Visit Notes, i.e. notes written by physician following an appointment.