

Peekaboo

Category: Scars

written by Deborah Levin | April 5, 2024

You can't see it, the way it's tucked under a fold of skin, but I can't forget that it's there. I see it whenever I look in the mirror at my shoulder-length hair and remember—despite my best efforts not to—the months when large bald spots dotted the crown of my head.

I feel it sometimes in my shoulder, which seems to remember the awkward positioning of my arm over my head during twenty sessions of radiation.

I sense it whenever I pass the hospital where I spent too much of my time that winter and spring three years ago.

I think about it every time I look at my forearm, where one of my veins collapsed (permanently) after a long transfusion.

I fear it every time I hear about someone newly diagnosed with cancer or I read about someone who has died from the disease.

I heal well from physical scars, have no disfiguring marks on my body to remind me of whatever traumas, large or small, I've endured over the years. But the psychological scar from that cancer diagnosis runs deep, hurts my heart at times, sings my brain at others. Kind doctors, nurses, and professional counselors have tried to help me get through—and see past—all that. I'm lucky, I know. I'm not dealing with the loss of any body part, of my mobility, or of my cognition. In the scheme of things, what happened to me wasn't life-altering in any significant way.

But it scared and scarred me nonetheless. And I've decided that regardless of what other people might think, I don't have to put it out of my mind. I need to accept that hidden wound as a part of my psyche and recognize that it's okay if it still haunts me.

I'm volunteering at a memory care facility now and recently met a new resident. When I asked her how she was feeling about her new "home," she explained her circumstances and said, "I'm doing my best," as a warm smile spread across her face.

How admirable, I thought. Honoring herself and her strengths while acknowledging the challenges of her situation. Mine is nowhere near the same, but her attitude inspires me. It's brave, positive, life-affirming. What a worldview: "I'm doing my best." I'd like to adopt it as my new motto.

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