

Died Alone

Category: House Calls and Home Care

written by Don Shoemaker | December 19, 2025

The loneliest existence I have ever encountered was a hospital room that briefly held an elderly man.

At report, there were no significant signs suggesting his inevitable outcome. I began my first rounds as I had done thousands of nights before. I checked on him and introduced myself. His response was lackadaisical, perhaps even whimsical. Nothing stood out. No red flags caught my attention.

Bedside greetings often fade quickly, consumed and forgotten like books read in grade school of which you only retain fragments. These conversations rarely linger. They are repeated so often that they become routine, stripped of emotion, and reduced to ritual. The rhetoric becomes mechanical, the motions automatic, the emotions taken out of it.

On my second rounds, a few hours later, I entered his room again. "Hello, Mr. So-and-So," I said. "I'm here to check your oxygen." He didn't respond. I assumed sleep had overtaken him. But when I glanced at the pulse oximeter, there was no reading. No heart rate. No heartbeat. He was a no-code, a DNR. The nurse confirmed the order and left. I remained at his bedside, staring.

Silence isn't a small enough noun. Stillness enveloped the room, pressing into every corner, settling into my chest like a weight I could not lift. Time stretched hollow and slow. The emptiness of the moment lingered, heavy, and pressing.

There were no witnesses. No family. No friends. No flowers. No balloons. No pomp. No circumstance. Just me—and my pulse oximeter.

I shed a tear and prayed, as I do each time someone dies: "Dear Father, welcome this son or daughter into Your rest, and help and comfort their loved ones. Amen." I wondered if he saw me, if his soul lingered, if he placed a hand on my shoulder to offer consolation.

To die peacefully is my wish. To die alone would be hellish. I imagine hundreds of people filling the waiting room, lamenting my loss, standing room only out into the halls. I imagine weeping and wailing, lamenting the great loss I am to humanity.

He had none of that fantasy. Just me, standing there, contemplating my own future fate.

*Don Shoemaker
Herriman, Utah*