

No Diamond Necklace

Category: Guts

written by Neeta Nayak | April 13, 2026

While most 16-year-olds have parties to celebrate turning “Sweet Sixteen,” my memories of that birthday are of a disinfectant-varnished hospital.

One morning while I was studying physics, my observant surgeon-dad said, “Let’s look at your neck.” I thought it an odd request. “You have a thyroid mass,” he said. Within moments, I was weighing treatment options. Ironically, my dad’s thesis during his surgical residency was on thyroid disease: one of life’s wry twists.

My first thought was “Is this cancer? Will I be dead by 17?”

One imagines life as a long corridor, not a door shutting early. I had ranked twelfth statewide among tenth-graders and was determined to move up into the top five. Suddenly, I wondered if my studiousness had been futile and chided myself for foregoing a friend’s party. I should have had fun, eaten more ice cream, danced and prayed more, if I was going to die young. It was my first lesson that balance is understood in hindsight.

Dr. M, a surgeon-friend of my dad’s, recommended surgery in a year. He explained that I would be intubated and under general anesthesia and would wake up with a necklace-like incision that would leave a permanent scar. A strange kind of jewelry.

I thought, “If it’s to be done, let’s do it. Why postpone the inevitable?”

I requested an immediate operation. He said, “Kiddo, I like your guts.” Three days later, I was on the operating table, counting sheep as the anesthesia induced an oblivion I hoped would not become permanent. I woke while being extubated to excruciating pain. Still more painful were hunger pangs, coughing when swallowing, and the aroma of food from adjoining rooms while on “NPO” status—unable to take in anything by mouth. It was a reminder that deprivation sharpens desire in inconvenient ways.

Given permission to eat rice congee, I remember how heavenly that simple morsel tasted.

The next morning, Dr. M said, “Tell your mom to buy a diamond necklace to hide your incision. It’s long.” The light remark lingered on my impressionable mind.

I never disguised that long scar. I came in third in the pre-university state ranking; my life resumed its earlier script. I was honest about my medical history with my prospective husband. I took unnecessary thyroid supplements until an endocrinologist said they were not warranted after subtotal thyroidectomy for a benign adenoma.

And I do not wish to own a diamond necklace. A scar can be a silent reminder

that sometimes the things we survive become the only ornaments we truly need.

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