

Coffee and Miracles

Category: The Waiting Room

written by Karen Ross | May 26, 2016

I am sipping the foam off my café latte, holding the cup with both hands because they're shaking so much. It is early morning and very cold, even for New York, but the waiting room at Mount Sinai Hospital is warm and open to a 10-story atrium courtyard. The Starbucks on the ground floor seems to be the hub of the hospital, as, from the balcony of the waiting room, I watch doctors in scrubs, patients in wheelchairs, Hasidic Jews (identifiable by their curls) in black coats standing in a line that snakes through the lobby.

Our family is in the surgical area, where my son Michael, soon to be ordained as a rabbi, is having brain surgery to treat symptoms of generalized dystonia. Mike was 12 years old when he was diagnosed with the movement disorder, which contracts and twists the muscles of his body. Today, electrodes will be implanted deep in his brain; he must remain awake during the long surgery.

Later, the electrodes will be hooked up to battery packs. We all hope when it's over that Mike will be able to walk without turning his leg and foot inwards, be able to pick up a spoon with his right hand to feed his infant son, be able to walk down the aisle of a synagogue carrying a Torah without falling.

Rachel, Mike's wife, is also a rabbi. Sitting in a white plastic chair in the waiting room, she pretends to read *People* magazine, but I think she is praying. I see her purple Converse sneakers jumping up and down. My first husband, Mike's dad, dozes in another white plastic chair. My second husband reads his Kindle and looks up at me to see how I am doing.

My coffee has gone cold, but I still hold the cup for comfort. Maybe that's why there are so many people still in line at Starbucks. Coffee comforts us and reminds us that there is a normal world beyond these walls. I am still holding my cold coffee cup four hours later when the phone rings and they tell us they are halfway through the surgery and all is going well.

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