

# Not Sharing

Category: Holidays

written by Astrid Grouls | December 2, 2017

I'm not going to share the whole story. That period of time was awkward and painful and private. Health scares and hospital stays seem more personal when they happen over the holidays. There's something a little more permanent about them in the collective family memory. We'll never forget that Christmas in the hospital.

Medically, it wasn't that big a deal. Just a simple back surgery. It's amazing how the tables turn when it's a family member sitting in the hospital on Christmas. The whole family was there. I remember my brother and me following the doctor out of the room, peppering him with more and more questions. At the time, I imagined there was some link between the doctor and me. Him the busy attending in a field I sought to join and me, the medical student who hadn't even matched to a specialty yet. Looking back it seems naïve, but at the time I felt a special weight on my shoulders. I knew more medicine at the time than anyone else in my family.

We ate Christmas dinner in the cafeteria. It was cold and isolated, and we felt the looks of pity from the cafeteria staff. The food wasn't the same as home, and there was no hot oven to gather around. No plates of crackers and cheese being passed from hand to hand.

I can't share much more. The whole thing was just a blur of hours in the hospital, watching on Facebook as other families celebrated their togetherness and health and blessings. I feel almost guilty writing this now, as if I didn't want to be there with my family at his bedside. But I don't think I'm alone in these thoughts. Every Christmas since, there's always a moment when we reflect on that one Christmas that was different: a moment when we all breathe a little sigh of relief that this Christmas can be normal again.

*Astrid Grouls*  
*Houston, Texas*