

Waiting for the Future to Arrive

Category: Waiting

written by Robin Gotler | October 22, 2020

After my husband rolled out of bed and onto the floor—a loud thunk at 3:00 a.m.—time moved quickly. Paramedics. Hospital. Unfolding diagnosis: *Looks like a stroke. Definitely a stroke. Massive stroke.* Decision: *No dooming him to a future without movement or speech, without the ability to appreciate sci-fi and Mozart and spring.*

Then the waiting began. His brain took its sweet time to ease into the complete and irreversible loss of function necessary for organ donation. In truth it was only days, but each one felt endless. I sat alone. I sat with family and friends. I walked the hospital hallways, trying to create to-do lists through my gray cloud of trauma. *Call lawyer. Pick up healthcare directive. Change life plans.* I sat some more. Waiting became a way station, a stopping off point where I sat and watched for the arrival of a future I did not want.

Eventually, the spark that was him officially died. On that final day, I shooed away the visitors, closed the curtains in his ICU room and pulled out the CD player I brought from home. We listened to music from his exquisite collection. We talked. (Okay, I talked, but I like to think that, on some level, he heard, as I remembered and apologized and said thanks.) In the peace of that room, with an end finally in sight, I didn't want the waiting to stop. I wanted to sit there for years, just the two of us, Sinatra singing over the clank and hiss of the ventilator.

A few hours later, the chaplain arrived. She waited patiently as I gathered my belongings so that my husband and I could take one last walk together. We made a somber parade down the ICU hallway, an aide pushing my husband's bed, me walking behind, followed by the chaplain. Nurses stepped aside and waited respectfully for us to pass. We walked to the operating room entrance, where the doors slid open. Inside, I glimpsed the surgical team finishing final preparations as they waited for my husband to arrive.

The aide turned and asked if I was ready. He waited for me to respond. I kissed my husband, then nodded. The aide wheeled him inside and the doors slid shut. Our waiting was over.

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