

# Solitude Interrupted, Thankfully

Category: Alone

written by Sara Ann Conkling | June 17, 2023

I knew the private room at the busy teaching hospital was a rare luxury.

I had spent the entire day having invasive and uncomfortable tests; I was in the hospital because my left kidney had been partially destroyed by an interventional radiologist who had failed to distinguish between a renal cyst and a renal diverticulum. Thus my left kidney had been ablated with alcohol—twice. I was in pain, infected, and bleeding internally.

I could only imagine that the interventional radiologists had begged the urology service to isolate me, so I couldn't speak to anyone about my tragedy. I knew that the failure to add contrast to my CT scan was what had caused the radiologists to make the diagnostic error. I knew too much. So here I was, alone in a quiet room which on any other day would certainly contain two patients.

My solitude didn't last long. A roommate arrived, with apologies from the nursing staff. My new roommate's former roommate had developed something contagious, and they didn't want my new roommate to catch it, so they moved her into my room. The nursing staff had nowhere else to put her.

My new roomie and I began to chat after she was settled. I asked her what she did for work. She replied that she was a medical examiner.

"You're early!" I exclaimed. "They haven't killed me yet!" The dark humor of the situation was inescapable, and the plan to keep me quiet was obviously failing. I told her my story and heard her tale of how she had landed in the hospital.

Later, after the urologist arrived to tell me that I would have to sign a consent form that would allow them to take my whole kidney if they couldn't save any of it, she asked me if I was okay. I wasn't, so I was glad she'd asked. How do you say goodbye to a formerly healthy kidney and the health status that goes with having complete kidney function?

All day I had endured a parade past my bedside of Polyannas chanting "You can live with one kidney," as if that fixed everything. By contrast, my roomie understood pathology. She understood pain. She understood loss.

I started that day alone, but, thankfully, ended it with a new friend.

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