

GUY'S HOSPITAL, LONDON ... 1974

The following is an absurd, truthful story that is too ridiculous. Almost laughable, farcical, and painfully ludicrous. I don't believe one could just make this up. Quite to the contrary, it would have to be lived!

As I wrote in the preceding story, I had developed a unique bed system to treat patients who suffered from decubitus ulcers (bed sores), with the kind assistance of Professor William Heald, Senior Surgeon at Guy's Hospital. This particular day I was paying a social and hopefully intellectual visit to that outstanding old teaching hospital.

I clearly recall the very cold day it had turned into. I was wearing a heavy suit, waistcoat or vest, shirt and tie, all enclosed in a black and white tweed overcoat. Quite warm, but elegant. Hours later I was to regret that.

The professor and I were, for some reason, in a small, cramped room that held various items required by the staff: cabinets full of medicines, and just behind where I was standing, scissors, syringes, many glass items, and so forth, all held in glass bowls, resting in specific places on metal carts. Professor Heald was showing me photographs of a patient we were to visit, and I reached out to see one a bit clearer. That's when he noted I had a ganglion on my wrist. For anyone not aware, that's a fairly large, clearly raised sore. He said that it really should be removed and it wouldn't take him more than a few minutes to "slice" it off. I was paying little attention to it, and said he should do whatever he wanted.

Now, remember, I'm in a very well heated small room, wearing an overcoat and dressed very warmly. Dr. Heald and I were speaking and looking at these photos and we were standing the entire time. He commented that he should get some bandages, as there would be blood and fluid shortly coming from the area he was cutting. It was only then that I looked down and saw this mess flowing out from my wrist. He berated himself and said that these were not the ideal circumstances to do this operation, noting that I was starting to perspire. Then I recall him asking if I was all right. Of course I said yes. This was just a few seconds before I realized the room was moving all around me.

The next thing I remember is loud, critical voices, and me laying on the floor.

Apparently, Dr. Heald had hit a vein with the scalpel. That set off various vibrations in

my brain and I fell over ... backwards, hitting the back of my head with the tray that held all the glass and instruments. That made for quite a bit of glass going into the back my scalp. I sat up, saw three or four nurses and began apologizing profusely. This fell on deaf ears as the professor was now continuously apologizing as well. He said that he should have had me sitting, not standing up, and that all my heavy clothing should have been removed. This mutual apologetic charade continued, until one of the staff stated that she felt she had removed all the glass in my head. However, I should certainly get an x-ray, to be certain I did not have a severe concussion.

My objections were ignored and I was taken down to the first floor where the x-ray equipment was. There were quite a few people there waiting their turn. I told the person to leave me, as I was fine and would wait in my place in line. He left, and I just went to sleep. Totally unconscious. At least twenty other people went in before me. Finally, I was tapped on the shoulder and asked why I had not gone into the x-ray room when called. I was then taken into this large room, perhaps 100 years old or more, and told to lie on a table. I was still completely dressed. As I surveyed the walls, I noted that all were in desperate need of a coat of paint. They had sandbags that were tied to the heavy x-ray machines, making them easier to raise and lower to the patient. I wondered how old this mechanism was. It seemed practically archaic to me. Almost from a different century, long past. Then I blinked as I saw the sandbag being used to lower the equipment for me suddenly break loose from its moorings. It took only a few seconds, but I vividly remember the missile gliding straight for my head! It was spot on target. It weighed about 50 pounds, and was probably more than three feet long. I never stood a chance of avoiding it. The collision with my now screaming head was deafening, and I was blown off the table. The orderly helped me up and I believe was trying to apologize as he placed me back on the table. This time they were able to take x-rays.

For some foolish reason, I thought I needed to see the professor before I left. Somehow I found the elevators and was the last person to get into the one that appeared. Meaning, I would be the first person off. When we arrived at the main floor, I took one step and something immediately ripped into my shins; it was someone pushing a metal

wheelchair, obviously in a hurry. I don't know if I cried before I hit the floor or afterwards. However, it felt as if both of my legs had exploded. I'm pleased to say the person pushing the wheelchair realized he was moving too fast and instantly apologized. So it was my wrist, head, head again, and now my shins. When I opened my eyes, Jimmy O'Sullivan, one of my delivery men, was there. Also the professor and a host of others, all wanting to know why this well dressed man was sprawled out on the floor! I can say with authority that I have never been apologized to more frequently, in such a short period of time, than in that hospital visit.

Jimmy asked if I had had a heart attack. Looking up, I calmly replied, "Not yet, but perhaps soon." I was helped to my feet and the fellow from the x-ray department appeared. He then told of the fiasco that took place downstairs. Professor Heald spoke of the disaster that had taken place with the scalpel, and the orderly spoke of his urgency with the wheelchair. I have never seen a professional staff so frozen in their places. Jimmy tried to make light of it and said it was a good thing that I was in a hospital. I could only stare at him and say, "Oh, quite right, James. Now if it isn't too difficult, would you kindly take me elsewhere. It doesn't matter where. My office, my home, anywhere. But please take me away."

When the day started, it was a beautiful, sunshine-filled day. Now it was pouring rain. I discovered that I had left my umbrella inside. But no way was I ever going to go back inside Guy's Hospital again. I haven't to this day.