

Perspective

The waiting room

So, I'm at this incredibly huge hospital complex with signs placed throughout the campus proclaiming "Thank you for making us #1 in the U.S. for heart care."

This hospital complex is so big that they have shuttle buses continually transporting patients and their escorts to different buildings throughout the campus. It's so big, that they have two Starbucks and a Panera Bread restaurant located inside the main building where the reception desk is located. The hallways are so wide that a small jet could land without the wings touching the walls of the corridor. In fact, this medical facility does remind me of an airport.

There are plenty of waiting areas just off the main corridor, and frequent announcements over the PA system. I heard a voice on the PA calmly proclaim, "Code blue, J as in Juliet, J-20." This announcement is repeated multiple times, and although I expect to see people in white coats racing toward J-20, I notice nothing. Just patients and loved ones walking patiently throughout these very wide, sparkling white corridors.

I am seated in a very comfortable lounge chair with many others. We caregivers sit down in fake leather chairs and when we first sit down and our posterior hits the cushion, a sound resembling the passing of gas occurs and I think that my grandkids would be snickering if they were here.

From my vantage point, I can see a lengthy line of people waiting for a row of receptionists to take down information from insurance cards and direct patients down various hallways for their appointment. In two hours, the line stretches down the hallway 30 deep, as social distancing does not appear to be working.

All of us are waiting while our spouse, our relative or our friend undergo EKGs, X-rays, echocardiograms, CT-Scans, lab work, heart catheterizations, and consultation with a cardiologist. I hear repeatedly, "I can take who's next."

Most everyone in line is holding a cell phone. Everyone is masked up and wearing a variety of winter jackets since it is winter in the Midwest. Ethnic groups from around the world make up this line. I saw

So there I was

By Pete Buckley
pete.buckley@tuscolareview.com



one patient wearing Amish garb, (a long black skirt, white colored bonnet, resembling the woman in the American Gothic painting). Another person in line was from the Middle East with a well-pressed scarf on his head, wearing a robe while walking with a cane and speaking Arabic to his son.

This waiting line is composed of mostly older patients with a sprinkling of younger ones. More than a few patients are in wheelchairs (five in a row) with their significant other standing behind them pushing, and a couple more are pushing walkers.

One woman was seated in a wheelchair while holding onto a walker folded onto her lap. She appeared ancient, but despite her age, her conversation with her caregiver was detailed and sharp. One woman in line looked exactly like Ruth Bader Ginsberg. Another patient looked like Al Roker.

Those of us waiting for our loved one to finish with their procedure are working on laptops or tapping on cellphones. I can't help but overhear conversations from people from throughout the U.S. sitting all around me. As I've come to learn during my stays at various waiting rooms, men and women in stressful situations seem to seek comfort from strangers.

One woman identifies herself to the stranger seated next to her by explaining that she is from Virginia, "My husband is having a valve replaced." The man sitting next to the Virginian, replied "My wife has an enlarged heart. I'm from Columbus. She has a high hernia. I don't know what they're gonna do about that. What can they do for it? I don't know. It impacts her throat." These are voices of deep concern and emotion. The man from Columbus and the woman from Virginia continue their

conversation:

"Are you spending the night here?"

"Yes. We're staying a week. Tests today and tomorrow, surgery on Wednesday. Then they want us to stay around a couple days. We live 8 hours away."

"We live 3 hours away."

"Where are you staying?"
"The Holiday Inn. We don't have insurance. If we pay ahead, we get 35% off. My husband couldn't eat so I felt bad for him. His aorta is swollen."

The Columbus man explains that he and his wife have been back and forth to various doctors for a year. They thought about going to a clinic in Charlottesville. He continues:

"There are two holes through her heart. After three days in the hospital, I took her home to keep an eye on her. She was in total misery the whole time. There has to be somebody in this world that can fix her heart. That is \$45,000 right there."

There are too many conversations like this one going on all around me. I can't see their mouths because of their mask, but everyone's eyes are very focused and I suspect there are few smiling faces. However, when patients finally exit these hallways into the arms of their loved ones, they seem to have a bounce in their step as if they have had a weight lifted off their shoulders. Whatever their issue is, the medical test and/or consultation with a cardiologist brings them one step closer to resolution.

I know that famous Tuscola podcaster, Bill Engelhardt, is known for his optimistic outlook on people and life in general. I ran across a quote that Bill might have used:

"Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness. - Desmond Tutu. During my visit to the hospital, I saw a lot of hope.



The show must go on

Outwardly, I've never been accused of being sentimental. No one's really seen the totes of baby clothes and preschool art in my garage, so they just have to just go with what I put down.

I like to label it nostalgic rather than sentimental. And lately, as the world, country, and state ease up on the COVID restrictions, and as the public in general stresses a little less, I've felt nostalgic about many returning experiences.

Other people must be feeling it too, like in December when parents and grandparents filed into the cafeteria for the return of Christmas concerts. Or, if you work for a company that really went gung-ho for masking, seeing your co-worker's full face again after 2 years.

This weekend I had one of those moments and my heart was so full. I'm lucky to have jumped on purchasing tickets to the high school musical when they went on sale. I usually wait to purchase tickets at the door for local events. By opening night all four showings had completely sold out. Besides family and friends of the performers, I'm sure there were others in the crowd like me who just wanted to get back to something that was once normal pre-COVID. My kids are big Disney fans, so I knew they'd be thrilled with the live show.

While the entire show was fantastic and the performers hit their cues spot on, it wasn't until about halfway through the show that the nostalgia kicked in and I couldn't help but smile. For reference, I do not know a single actor in the musical personally. I still couldn't help but be extremely proud of these teenagers, signing in front of a crowd, memorizing all those lines and dance moves. Reagan Smith's facial expressions were so on point.

Margie's Mess

By Margie Carter
margie@tuscolareview.com



Cillian Tryon's Maleficent laugh gave me goosebumps. Every joke delivery hit exactly where it should. At one point, I watched one of my girls mouthing "This is so good" while she stared up at a song and dance number. She wasn't wrong.

The thing is, I was once one of those performers. My elementary school in the middle of Chicago had an impressive theater program. From around 1st grade until 8th I was involved in a yearly play or more. In 3rd grade, my class worked with the theater teacher to write a radio play about the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In 6th grade, a smaller group of us worked on writing a play adaptation to the book *Off and Running* by Gary Soto about a grade school student council election.

My debut acting was in 1st grade. The show comprised of 4-short plays all dealing with myths of the origin of the sun. To this day, I'm not sure how the last play in the series dealt with the sun. It was also adapted from a book by the title "Why Mosquitos Buzz in People's Ears" by Verna Aardema. The story was easy to follow and illustrates how one lie can spread and create chaos.

I played the mosquito in the play and spent most of the time buzzing around in the background as everyone else told the story. In the end, my lie was found out and the king of

the jungle, the lion, forever labels me as a liar. I close the play by buzzing around the other characters with what would later become my most famous line in my short acting career. "Are you still mad at me? Are you? Are you? Are you?"

I still haven't lived that line down. It didn't help that in 1992 the ability and affordability to record to a VHS tape was peaking. My mom purchased a recording to *The Four Myths of The Sun* and for years my siblings would re-watch it. I suspect they would collectively decide that I was getting a little big for my britches and felt obligated to remind me where I stood. They would spend better part of the rest of the day repeating "Are you? Are you? Are you?"

My time on stage ended with little drama. I tried out for a high school play freshman year and didn't get a call back. That was enough for me to decide that my time was better spent on other things. It's not one of the things I've had to address in therapy, I'd say I came out of it unburnt.

Then I'm looking up at these kids, unapologetically being amazing on stage and a little bit of me resents 14-year-old me for not trying again. Granted, I'm a lot better at a lot of other things than acting, one of them being able to be inspired by people who have lived less than half my life in years but are doing things I never dared to reach for.

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Work and other four-letter words

Once again, I find myself procrastinating. I do know people who are less productive and lazier than I am, and sometimes, I go to the cemetery to visit them.

I find work to be a great sleep aid. When I'm supposed to be sleeping, I frequently battle insomnia. But as soon as the alarm goes off and it's time to go to work, narcolepsy kicks in.

I have tried to trick myself by pretending I have work to do but that's a tough sell. You can't use your own brain to convince the same brain of a fallacy of its own making.

So I enlisted the help of my

Ramblin' Man

By David Porter
porter@ramblinman.us



wife whose brain is better and more convincing than my own. Now when I can't sleep, she knows to say, "Well, get up then and get some work done. You'll thank yourself later."

Snore.

I don't understand it. It's not like the work I do is difficult or unpleasant. It's kind of a stretch to call it work. In fact, stretching is more strenuous

and thus something I also avoid doing.

Work is a four-letter word and four-letter words can be bad. As a precaution, I avoid as many of them as I can. I just used a few in the last couple of sentences, and that makes me nervous.

Of course, some four-letter words can be good. The word good is good. In fact, it's the only four-letter word that is good. Literally.

Best is the best four-letter word. It's like good but better.

Love isn't a bad word but it can be confusing. Disappointing at times. Popular music has

taught us that love is strange. Love hurts. Yet, love, love me do.

It just occurred to me that word is a four-letter word. Perhaps that is the crux, the root and the apex of my aversion to work. Too many four-letter words.

Other four-letter words I try to avoid include math, yams, fish, diet, bath and soap.

There are four-letter words that I like. In fact, you can't like anything without that particular four-letter word. I'm fond of the four-letter word quit. I have a lot of quit in me. Stop is another good one. Anything I

don't like, I can simply stop and quit. I can stop and quit as well as anyone. Better than most, I reckon.

Yesterday, I quit smoking cigars. I'll probably quit again today.

Done is another four-letter word that I like especially when it is paired with work. This seems like a good place to stop and quit. Because my work is done.

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