

An “Angel of Mercy”

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It was not until I was 82 years and 7 months old that I had my first ride in an ambulance to an emergency room. Up until then my associations with emergency rooms and hospitals had been minimal: ER for an infected foot; hospital for hernia operations, crunched rotator cuff and a couple of stents in cardiac arteries. On all these occasions I walked in on my own, with no trauma-drama getting to the hospital.

That changed 5:30 one morning when I passed out while trying to get to the bathroom. I came to looking at the base of the toilet. Whenever I tried to move, everything became white. Could not lift my head or everything would turn white and down I would go again. I thought to myself, “Is this how it all ends, the last thing I see will be the base of a toilet?” Finally, I crawled back to the bed and pulled myself up and in.

A few minutes later I tried to go to the bathroom again. This time I did not pass out, but collapsed flat out on the bathroom floor. Again, I could not lift my head or everything would turn white and I would fall back on the floor. I finally crawled back to the bed, but could not pull myself up. Each time I tried, everything would turn white and down I would go. Even with my wife helping, I could not get off the floor. Kind of scary. I wondered if my 17 year-old stents finally had failed and my heart was in trouble.

I told my wife to call 911, which she did. I had crawled out of my pajamas on the way back to the bed and was now lying flat on my back, stark naked. I assumed EMT crews were “certified” to see “everything.” However, even at my age and the condition I was in, my vanity was too much. I was able to reach into my underwear drawer next to me and drag out a T-shirt and pair of shorts. These I pulled on before “whiting out” again.

The next thing I saw was the face of a pretty young woman looking into my eyes. First I thought, “An Angel? Am I dead?” Then I saw her EMT uniform and realized she was not an “Angel.” I knew I was still alive when she asked, “Can you tell me your name?” Before I told her, I thought to myself, “Now, this is much better. If *am* going to die, the last thing I will see is the face of a pretty woman. Much preferable to the base of a toilet bowl.” I told her my name, where I was, what day it was, and what had happened.

She and the other two in the team tried to get me up, but to no avail. I whited out and fell back down each time they tried. Finally, she asked me if I wanted an ambulance. I told her I thought we needed one. Soon, there were others in the bedroom putting me on a gurney and taking me down the stairs. When going down the stairs, everything turned completely white. I could not see anything. When at the bottom, my head cleared somewhat, and I again saw the EMT woman looking down at me and asking how I felt. I told her, “OK.” The last I saw of her. She had done her job. Off we went, lights flashing, siren screeching.

The rest of the episode was routine. ER and finally to ICU. In neither place were the doctors and technicians able to find anything seriously wrong with me, only that I was

dehydrated. Apparently this is a common condition in us old folks. I was sent home the next day and told to be careful, drink more water and see if anything reappeared, I was, I did and nothing did.

I understand that my little episode was nothing compared to what the EMT responders see each day. The horrible accidents, young children that are dead or maimed when they get to them, the risks to themselves in doing their jobs. Day in and day out. All these make my problem pale in comparison. Still, for me it was an emotional sensation, when afraid my heart was giving out, to see the young attractive face looking down at me. I was put at ease, feeling someone competent was there to help me, whatever my problem. She was a calming influence.

If ever I am in a similar or more serious situation, I hope that once again, I will see such a soothing face looking into my eyes and asking, "Can you tell me your name?" At such a time, she *will* be an "Angel" to me—an "*Angel of Mercy.*"