

A Great Guy

by Frederick Wickert

Have you ever met a guy that you instantly liked? Someone you knew right away that you could be good friends and neighbors with, without even knowing anything about him? This story is about such a guy

I had returned to the post cardiac arterial bypass grafting unit, otherwise known as the “Cabbage” unit of Albany Medical Center in Albany, New York. I had just come from cardiac ICU where I spent a couple of days following bypass surgery. I was to complete my recovery before going home in the “cabbage” unit. You guessed it. I was one of their “cabbages.”

In the morning, a very large young man with light colored crew cut hair entered my room, wearing green scrubs. He was one of the nurses on the floor, but functioned as a do it all member of the staff. If it needed to be done but was unpleasant or required a bit more muscle than the girls wanted to use, or were able to use, he was the guy. He was everywhere, doing everything.

The young mans name is Bryan. Bryan was always ready to help in any way that was needed. With an IV on my arm and a heart monitor wired up to me, I found I was having great difficulty in fastening the hospital gown, which ties in the back. I asked if he could give me a hand.

For two or three years there has been a spot in my back that from time to time felt like I had a needle pricking me, but never could find any reason for it. As Bryan was behind me as I sat up in bed, taking care of my gown for me, he commented on a big black head I had in my back. He asked if I wanted him to take it out for me. I said I’d be happy to have him remove it if he didn’t mind.

He began manipulating the skin around it in a gentle manner. I was surprised as I expected to feel a big pinch. No pinch came. Finally he said, “Here it comes. We got it now.” He then came around to my front and showed me a thing with a black head and a white root about five eighths of an inch long. He explained to me they are caused from oil in the skin and explained that the white root is nothing more than hardened fat. He told me that if you keep working around them with your fingers they finally loosen up and come out. A couple of months have passed, and I have never again felt that pin pricking sensation, so I am sure that black head was the cause of it.

Every morning there were two jobs that Bryan had to do. One was to wheel a very large platform scale from room to room, getting everyone’s weight and recording it on their charts. The other was to take all the sugar tests. This was done by pricking the finger of the patient and getting a reading from the resulting blood.

As happened to me and to about 80% of the other Cabbages, due to great stress from the surgery, their sugar was temporarily elevated and had to be treated by insulin injections. It was ordered that my finger prick had to be done five times a day. Bryan observed that my sugar readings were steadily going down. He went to the doctor and brought it to his attention. He asked if the number of times my finger had to be pricked could not be reduced. The doctor agreed with him and changed the order to twice a day.

Bryan spent a lot of time getting the patients up on their feet and getting them to walk in the hallway. He walked along with them to provide support if needed. Twice he kept me from falling. I did okay walking straight but lost my balance for some reason when turning the corner.

Memorial Day weekend, Bryan was working. In the conversation it came out that on that day was his daughters sweet sixteen birthday. She had gone camping with some other people in one of the nearby state parks. I sympathized with him for having to work and not be able to be with her on her birthday. He simply shrugged, smiled and said, “It’s okay. Someone had to be here and it might as well be me. I’ll make it up to her later.”

During Memorial Day weekend the helicopters were non-stop around the clock, bring patients in to the hospital. The window of my room was near the landing pad and I could hear them coming and going. All

empty beds in the ward were soon filled with patients from the emergency room, which was overflowing. One of these was placed in my room.

The man was a large sized man with long hair in a braid. His ear was blood encrusted. He had a head injury from a vehicle accident. He was suffering from some memory loss. Staff was constantly asking for his name and date of birth and he could not give it to them. When his family came to see him, he was asked whom one of his visitors was. With great difficulty, he eventually stuttered that it was his mother. He recognized his brother but was unsure of the identity of another man who turned out to be his best friend.

This went on for two days with no noticeable sign of improvement. His mother had brought him some clean clothes the night before. Bryan came in and got the man out of bed. He didn't want to but he didn't resist and Bryan was insistent. Bryan escorted him to the shower, got his clothes off and got him in the shower. He assisted the man as much as was needed, helping him especially to wash his hair. He got the blood off from around his ear too.

That shower, or Bryan's touch or a combination of both, made all the difference in the world. The man not only looked better but he obviously felt better. He immediately became far more coherent and his memory seemed to improve by half. He was well on his way to recovery. Perhaps not, but it certainly seemed like it was all due to Bryan making him take that shower. He did it in such a way that the man never resented it and never became stubborn or resistant. I doubt very much anyone else, even in the man's family, could have accomplished that.

Bryan, male nurse at Albany Med "cabbage" unit, is one great guy.