

*A Precious Gift*

*by Frederick Wickert*

Recently, I was told that I needed a quadruple heart bypass. I was admitted immediately to Albany Medical Center hospital in Albany, New York. I was put in a room with another man in the cabag (pronounced Cabbage) department. Cabag stands for Coronary Artery Bypass and Grafting. Hospital personnel referred to the patients there for bypass and grafting, as “cabbages.” I have been called many things and many names in my life, but it was the first time I have ever been called a “cabbage.”

It all began as a very simple and straightforward plan. For a year, I had been taking a drug called Plavix. The drug is a blood thinner. It could cause excessive bleeding during the surgery and was therefore necessary to get it out of my system before the surgery could be done.

For a few days my hospital stay was to eliminate the Plavix from my system. Tests had shown that my system was a little dehydrated so I was to build that up as well. As soon as tests indicated all was well, they could proceed with the surgery.

I had an IV in the back of my right hand. In a few days my hand and arm began to swell and turn red in color. I was diagnosed with a staph infection in the right hand and forearm. The Plavix was dissipating as desired, but surgery with a staph infection was unsafe. That had to be brought under control.

I was moved to another room nearby. That room had room for only one patient. Because of the infection they did not want me with other patients as they might also become infected.

My new room was on the corner. I had a good view of one of the long hallways and could watch traffic part way up the hallway. In the previous room I could see no farther than the door of the room. I enjoyed this new scenery, being of a curious nature to begin with. Directly across the hall on the corner was a small room with a counter for the nurses to do their paper work.

To treat the staff infection it was necessary to first remove the IV from the infected hand. Another was placed in the back of my left hand. Antibiotics had to be given every four hours. This procedure was done with the use of an electric pump. The liquid medication was loaded into the pump and then pumped over the period of a half hour into my hand through the IV insert. I had several doses and all was well.

Prior to the staph infection, I had walked up and down the hallways late in the evening. I became slightly acquainted with a number of the staff. I cannot say enough about that wonderful staff. The entire group of nurses and nurses assistants were by far the finest I have encountered anywhere in my lifetime. This group was the most professional, the most compassionate and the most friendly and competent that I have ever seen. As a group, they were wonderful. The care rendered to the patients in that ward was the very best ever.

Late one night while walking the halls I encountered a tiny little lady. She was one of the nurses. She was also obviously expecting a baby. The other nurses were teasing her. They were saying that it must be wonderful to choose the birth date of ones child. She agreed that it was.

I asked her how she could do that and she replied this was her second child and this one was going to be delivered by caesarean birth. I asked her what day she had selected. She replied that it was going to be on August 8, 2008. I was dumfounded. That is the day my wife and I will have our 50th wedding anniversary and I told her that. She seemed pleased.

One night, soon after being moved to a private room, the same girl became my nurse on the midnight shift. I was pleased to have her care for me. At midnight she gave me the antibiotic dose. I learned that her name was Leila. At 4:00 A.M., Leila awakened me to give me the next dose of antibiotic. She hooked it up to the IV attachment in the back of my hand, turned on the pump and left the room.

About 4:10 A.M. the back of my left hand suddenly felt as if fifty bees had just stung me. It burned. Soon I could see my hand begin to swell and the pain became intense. I pushed the call button. Leila was there almost instantly. I told her what happened. She looked at my hand and announced that I had an infiltration. She quickly stopped the pump and removed the IV from my hand. I soon felt relief.

Leila said, "I have to call Tech Support for this," and hustled out of the room. In a few minutes, two other personnel I had never seen before came in the room. They looked at my hand and began to search for another vein. When they found what they wanted, they inserted another IV in my hand. I asked what had happened and they explained the antibiotic going in had ruptured the side of the vein and the antibiotic was being pumped under pressure, beneath the skin of my hand. It was unable to be rapidly absorbed.

While they were working on me I noticed Leila was not there. I mentioned to the people working on me that I was a little surprised that my nurse was not there watching them do their work. One of them smiled and said, "She is in that little nurses booth across the hall, saying her rosary for you."

Astonished, I asked, "You mean she is praying for me?"

"Yep. That's what she is doing."

I was overwhelmed with surprise and with gratitude. A nurse with her own problems, who barely knows me, is praying for me while the Tech people are working on me. I was deeply touched. I was also deeply grateful. No one could be more caring than that. No one could be receiving better care than that. I am and will be forever grateful to her.