

Wowee

by Frederick Wickert

Oh no. This cannot be, I kept telling myself. How could it be true? But it was.

I had been moved from the cardiac ICU where I had been after my heart bypass surgery. I was relocated to the post cardiac arterial bypass grafting unit in Albany Medical Center, Albany, New York. The unit is where patients called “cabbages,” using the initials of the long title to identify their patients, are kept before and after having their surgery.

I had been in the unit before, but on the other end of the ward. I was moved there in the morning of that day, and all seemed pretty much the same routine as before, except that my needs after surgery were somewhat different than before.

It wasn't until the day shift nurses were preparing to be relieved by the four to midnight shift that it began. I was sitting up in bed. It was a little after 4:00 P.M. The evening shift nurse came in to the room.

When I saw her I was instantly wide-awake. She was positively beautiful. Certainly more beautiful than anyone I had seen for some time. I involuntarily said under my breath, “Oh, wowee!” I soon wondered if I had reason to believe it had not been as under my breath as I thought.

It is the routine of all nurses in the unit, as soon as entering the room the first time on the shift, to go to a Plexiglas board attached to the wall. On the board they erase what was written before and then write the name of the nurse and the name of her assistant. As she stepped away from the board I was astonished to see written in the space for the name of the nurse, Wowie. I could not believe my eyes. Surely she must have heard my utterance and was having some fun at my expense.

I asked her, “Is that your real name?” She assured me that it was. As she approached the bed, I looked at the photo ID security badge she wore, as all of the nurses did. Sure enough, there it was. First name, Wowie.

Wowie was more than just beautiful on the outside. She was beautiful on the inside as well. This girl had the most caring way about her I had seen. She went way out of her way to insure each patient lacked nothing and that they were as comfortable as she could make them. She was always telling me; if I needed any thing at all, just call her. I said I did not want to call her for anything trivial as she was busy and I didn't want to bother her unnecessarily. She always replied that it was no trouble at all.

Every evening for the next few days she was my nurse. The more I got to know her the better I liked her. By the time I left there it was as though we were old friends. Perhaps even almost like family. All of the nurses in that cabbage unit were wonderful, and the best I had ever seen, but Wowie was something very special. So special that one forgot about her physical beauty as they learned of the inner beauty of her soul. I kept expecting to see her wearing a halo.

Finally, I learned one day that I was going home the next day. That night was to be the last I was to see her. That left me with a great bit of sadness in my heart, as I had enjoyed so much, the evenings with her as my nurse. She tended equally to all of her patients, but somehow made one feel as if she were there only for you. My roommate was given just as much attention as I, but somehow made me feel as though I were just a little more special than anyone else.

As that last evening drew near the end of her shift, she came into the room. I knew it was to be the last that I was going to see her and I wanted to say goodbye. As she turned to exit the room, I called her back. I told her that I was supposed to go home the next day and was not going to see her again. I wanted her to know how much I appreciated the wonderful care she had given me while in her care, and just how special I thought she was and the care she had provided me.

She took my hand, looked me straight in the eye, and very tenderly told me she had enjoyed taking care of me. That she considered it to have been a privilege. Then she said something that took me back a little. She

was from the Philippines, and she said, "I hope some day you will visit the Philippines, and when you do, be sure to go to the beaches. Manila has some of the most beautiful beaches in the world and the whitest sand you will ever see."

With that, she turned and left the room. I had the feeling that both of us were near tears. I know I was. I reflected for just a moment about it being a little bit strange for her to say what she did. Then it hit me. I knew she was giving me a gift of something dear to her heart. I once wrote A HIDDEN TREASURE. It is a story about a waterfall that was and is my "special place." It is a place that I have treasured in my heart all my life. I understood Wowie was sharing with me the most prized thing she had to give. It was her "Hidden Treasure," that she loved and cherished and wanted to share it with me.