

DAY 105, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2001

TODAY, SUNDAY MORNING, IS OUR SIXTH DAY HERE. We have gotten to know a few people. Some nurses are very helpful and caring. Some nurses need an orgasm, more than one. When you think of a hospital, you automatically think that all doctors and nurses are perfect choices for the jobs they choose to do and that none of them would have attitude or personality disorders. But, as in all things, there are all kinds of people working in all kinds of places. Hospitals too.

It would seem like I am the one who brought hundreds of thousands of dollars to UCLA hospital, simply by my seeking them out from many other choices. I looked at Norris Cancer Center in Los Angeles, City of Hope, USC, and a few others, but UCLA was noted as being a little cutting edge in their methods, and known also for being the finest in their field in medical research and groundbreaking treatments. I also liked that they were within a reasonable drive from my home. With these things in mind, I met with them and persuaded them to take Cheryl's case, based on these facts. It also is true that when I did decide to go with them, I put tens of thousands of dollars in their pockets. It would seem to me that someone armed with million-dollar policies, as she was, would be treated as some kind of VIP.

In Vegas, when a "whale" comes to town (that is what they call guests with huge money), people are tripping over each other and can not do enough for that person. I think that hospitals should be run like Vegas. A patient with serious medical problems and a hefty insurance policy would be given the finest rooms, great food, fine robes, good thick slippers, cigars, champagne, soft towels, and comps all over the place. The patients should get a pool, steams, massages, waxing, manicures, thinner needles, shorter catheters, and lower-volume enemas. Their spouses and brothers should have access to buffets, room service, candy strippers, and good seats at the chapel. What I find in hospitals are empty halls during the weekends, tasteless Jell-O, bad television, very poor concierges, limited valet, repulsive sleeping attire with those open-ended gowns, horrid lighting, and unavailable clergy.

Although the one time we did get a man of the cloth, he was very gentle and kind. I was thinking the real diocese he must have come from was too stressful; and they exiled him to a hospital where he could do God's work one person at a time. In hospitals, the patients are too ill to get choosy; and with no pastoral lineup, he would have to do. As in all things in LA, we did find out that the priest was also a part-time actor, who went out on roles requiring confessional skill and someone with the outfit. He had both, so I guess he was perfect for saving souls in a hospital at night and auditioning during the days. He was quite nice and did run down his television credits with me after seeing my sister. He did ease my sister's soul, at least for the time being. That's exactly what she needed.

If hospitals were run like Vegas, people would want to come there, even if surgery was part of it. It would not be pain and misery accompanied by bad conditions. It would be surgery one day and luxury for the remainder of the stay. That is how getting well should be handled, especially since the patient's insurance is paying the hospital whale-like tabs, without them having any roulette or slot or blackjack payouts. It is all profit for the hospitals. A patient doesn't even have the chance to hit any jackpots. That does not seem fair to me.

The UCLA doctors, for the most part, were excellent. The UCLA Breast Center was superb. The weak link in hospitals, I think, are the occasional nurses and outside contractors who bring to work their attitudes and frustrations. I have known nurses who are real caregivers and take their professions seriously, but as in all lines of work, there are a few who just piss you off. The time in life when you least need resistance and hostility is when you're sick and dying. Cheryl feared a few of them, and I was sorry to see it. Of all the things to know about getting ill, you should know that insurance companies and hospital staff could make or break your struggle. When you find a bad apple, it is simple. You have to take matters into your own hands, and quickly. Hospitals kill more people through error and attitude than is widely known. Just realize that watching every move is what is necessary. The wrong meds or the mislabeled chart happens. The bad news...you're sick, and still, you have to watch your back.

The weekend has past, and we are watching her back. Day 5 in here has seemed to her like 10. Us too. Cheryl is now fighting just to get out, and maybe that is good. I think she knows her life has taken on a new time schedule. She looks at us with fear and maybe envy. "Why me?" she must think...too young, too unready for such considerations. Why anybody? I don't know. It just seems to be random, this lifespan thing. I already got extra time from Southeast Asia, so I think differently. Cheryl has bargained in her head I am sure...first for some treatment and a cure, then second, ten more years, then five, or even two. Bargaining becomes the way. Just for more time. Time is so...something.