

DAY 95, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2001

YOU MAY NOT REALIZE IT, but we all develop a shower routine. By the time you're thirty or forty, you have showered thousands of times and a pattern of showering becomes methodical, with or without your awareness. I was realizing that today in particular when I turned on the water, adjusted the shower head to hit the wall, and not my floor, pulled the shower curtain across the bar, and let a minute or two produce hot water.

When I stepped in, I did the same thing I always do, year after year. I let the water hit my chest, then the back of my neck, and then stood there for a few minutes. That's the part I like the most, letting the heat dissolve any cold or tension out of me. That is also the time I like to close my eyes and test myself to see if my aging has chipped away at my equilibrium. If I can stand under a lot of hot water, with my eyes closed, and not fall and break my hip, then I think of myself as still viable and able-bodied.

The next thing I do is the routine part. I grab the soap and start under my left arm in those circular motions, then go straight for the stomach and chest. The lather builds, and with a generous handful, I put the soap back on the rack. My face gets lathered, and then the neck, shoulders, lower back, and arms. I never forget the outside of the arms...a misunderstood place in my opinion, and one easily forgotten. That is a lot of mileage out of one large handful of soap, but it seems to work.

All that circular motion and vigorous sudsing does get the skin squeaky. I do my back with one of those brushes with the long handle on it. That is a handy thing to have. I often watch TV while I do my back. I took two loops out of the shower curtain, so I can drop the curtain lower at that part of the bar, allowing me to see the bedroom TV while I use the brush. I've angled the screen toward the bathroom, so I can see it from any location. I can't hear it as good because of the water, but a football game or movie is still worth the visuals.

I'm particular about the soap. I don't like those that contain skin cream or cold cream. They leave a film on me that feels slimy...kind of greasy. I only use real soap that gives you that clean squeak...no moisturizing emollients or whatever those things are.

Next I go to the private parts. I've been noticing that recently that section is not as recreational as it used to be. Sometimes maybe, but lately I seem to just enjoy it for the showering aspect and not much more. I have even thrown my back out a few times trying to twist and turn in order to get the water to travel a certain pathway down my back and in order to get the soap from between my cheeks. That can be particularly dangerous, so I make sure I actually turn all the way

around to do that now. Don't want my back going out for the wrong reason.

Next I do the legs and feet, and that is always a matter of choice on the feet. I have to remember if I actually scrubbed my feet with the brush the day before, and if I did, then I just wash one foot with the other, so I don't have to bend down. Every other day with the brush seems good enough. Finally, I wash the hair. I do that every day. It seems like I should do that first, since all the suds go down my entire body over the clean parts, but I don't care. I like doing the hair last, even though it gets on the parts of the body I already did.

Watching those suds swirl down the drain is kind of therapeutic, like starting over each day with everything new and clean. Whatever happened the day before is over with and I just washed it into the LA sewer system and...another chance to start fresh. The old suds die, and with them go yesterday's business.

Another thing that happens in the shower, without much thought, is the reviewing I do on all the stuff that is on my mind...my own things that need to be done for the day...my personal life or lack of... my own health and any pains or internal visualizations of how my systems might be working...the heart, brain, muscles, intestinal system, joints. I think that if I have a bulge or lump on one side then find another on the exact opposite side, it must be okay. Both sides should have the same lump. I also think of all the issues that have plagued me throughout life.

Of late, though, I think of Cheryl taking her showers and what she must think as her suds disappear these last months. I think of her coming out here again this Saturday to deal with her cancer. I have been imagining how she must step into her shower and how her long-time routine has so traumatically changed. She has had better days in there, no question. The water now runs down her body in new streams, different from the paths that it used to. Her body landscape has changed and will be changed, so her routine has been altered. You never think much about that until you have to feel so strange at doing something that had been so thoughtless. There are parts of her she will not look at or feel. She told me so. It helps her to not know certain things, and I can see that logic. But you know, as we get older, the water does have to find new ways to get down our frames. We get fat. We don't stand as straight. We loose parts. Things sag. Trying to get the soap from between our cheeks seems like a lot more work.

I was just thinking of Cheryl's routine in there and the private thoughts she has these days. Hers are hers, and ours are ours. That time in the shower seems like our small inventory session, just enough time to run the tape we keep in our heads about who we are, or maybe who we think we are, and what we all have to deal with...the good and

the not so good. I like that time, I guess. It always feels good to get a new start each day. You can at least count on one thing in there...you're going to get wet, and you're going to get warm, and that usually feels good, no matter under what condition, or where it happens. I am hoping Cheryl's suds take with them all the troubles of her previous day. Unfortunately, that seems to be requiring one very large drain. I don't think mine is quite large enough.