



## Countdown!

Today's little episode is another of those that perhaps shows me in not the most flattering light - at least that's the reaction I have received when telling this story in person to a few people. I myself don't see it that way, but as we all know well, we are each the last person to be able to see ourselves clearly!

It was something that happened during my short hospitalization last year. In case you haven't been reading these stories regularly, and don't know about that, I can fill you in very easily: I developed a small hernia in the groin, and scheduled an operation to sew it up. Everything went smoothly, and I spent only two nights in the hospital - one pre-op and one post-op - before returning home to get back to work. There is now no apparent trace of the episode left on my body, and I suppose the area is now probably stronger than before.

Our story is about the operation itself. The medical staff went to great pains to explain the procedures and to make sure that I understood what they would be doing and what I could expect both during the operation and after. Repairing a small hernia is of course completely routine, and something that they have all seen/done any number of times, but for me, it was a 'first time' experience, and I was intensely interested in it. When I heard that the anaesthetic would be a local type, not knocking me out completely, I was pleased about this, and immediately asked the doctor if I would be able to watch the procedure. Perhaps there would be a mirror above me so that I could see what they were doing?

His reply was not unexpected, although disappointing. This would not be possible. They wanted as few distractions as possible, and although I myself knew that I would just watch quietly, they of course had no way to know that.

So things got under way. It was very interesting to see how many times they checked for possible errors before we started. I had to repeat my name to each person who came up to deal with me, who checked it against their paperwork, and I was asked quite a few times to confirm verbally on which 'side' of my body the operation was to take place, even though the hernia was clearly visible as a bulge on my abdomen. (I am not complaining about these intrusions - such procedures are clearly intended to minimize errors.)

They used an epidural anaesthetic, and once it had taken effect and the lower half of my body was 'gone', they began. I had hoped there might be perhaps a bit of 'play-by-play' reported to me, but they simply concentrated on their work and ignored me. All except the anaesthetist of course, who stood by my head and watched to make sure that I was breathing clearly. I was hooked up to a monitor system, and the display panel for this was in a position where both the anaesthetist and I could see it clearly. The upper part of the panel was a large display of my heartbeat, and below this were many smaller displays no doubt showing such data as oxygen in the blood, respiration details, and many other things I am not trained to understand.

It got boring. Nobody was talking to me, I couldn't feel anything, I couldn't move, and all I could see was a bright red display of my heartrate, updating every second or so. 60 ... 60 ... 59 ... 60 ... etc. and etc.

So I thought to myself, "Let's breath a bit more slowly and deeply, and see if I can lower that a bit ..." I put myself in 'relax' mode, slowed my respiration somewhat, and was pleased to see that I could indeed slow the rate down bit by bit. 58 ... 57 ... 56 ... 57 ... 56 ...

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I couldn't take it straight down, as it headed up again now and then, but I kept watching, kept thinking 'Relax ... relax ...', and down it slowly went. I was quite proud of myself, being able to relax so well, at the same time that people were doing such invasive things to my body.

This all came to a sudden end. I think it was when the number reached 48. A loud alarm went off, and the anaesthetist called the number out to the doctor, who quickly gave some instructions. A moment later, despite my attempt to explain what I had been doing - "No, please wait a minute! I'll bring it back up; just wait a few seconds ..." - they were injecting some kind of stimulant drug into the intravenous drip.

The heart rate did of course shoot right back up, by my own efforts if not through some effects of the drug, and from then on I was a 'good boy' and just waited quietly until they were done, after which they wheeled me back to my room.

Sigh. There's a proper time and place for everything, isn't there, and it's best not to get them mixed up ...

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