

Chapter 1 – The Operating Room

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March 6, 2012 – The nurse rushes to get my vitals, medication and paperwork completed. She has to register one more person by 7:30am and it's almost 7:25.

When she was almost finished, she turns to my sister Judy and asks her to go back to the waiting room to get the rest of the family. Only one person can escort me downstairs to the operating room so they have to say good-bye up here.

The nurse seems a little surprised that I have four people with me. At the very first orientation meeting I was told to surround myself with supportive people. I took that request literally.

With me today is my sister, my son Garth, my long-time friend Peter and my partner Sue. Not my life partner but my sister/friend who has been with me on this journey from day one to today...the day I begin my NEW life.

They all enter the small room with a hug and to wish me well and seem surprised with my excitement when I flash them a grin from ear to ear. I'm thrilled to start this journey I'm about to embark upon; this will be truly life changing to say the least.

"Oh...they're waiting for you," the nurse gasps as she gathers all of my papers and sends me on my way.

She asks me if I need a wheelchair, which I decline. I am proud to say I can walk there on my own.

I stand and proceed down the hallway with the family by my side. A male nurse asks me to wait at the corner by the elevator. Slowly another eight people join us. They're all dressed like I am, in fancy hospital gowns—one for the front and one on the back—a paper hair net and sexy blue paper slippers with elastics around the top to keep them on our feet. They are so thin it feels like walking in bare feet.

The hallway gets so full that I begin to wonder if we will all fit. The nurse makes his way to the front of the pack and leads us into the elevator. I get on first with Judy right behind me. We move to the back to make room for the other patients.

As the doors close, my eye catches Peter and Sue waving good-bye. Sue's face tells me everything will be just fine.

I know that in my heart, but it's nice to get the reassurance from her beautiful smile.

We had left the house at 5:15 this morning to be at the hospital for 6am. On the drive Judy asks me if I am nervous.

“Absolutely not”

I am so excited and anxious to get started, but nervous...not at all.

“Don’t worry...you will be!” she says confidently.

As the elevator descends, Jude looks at me as if to say...are you nervous now? I smile back at her. She can see that I am still on cloud nine and not the least bit nervous.

The doors open and everyone heads to the left. We follow behind like good little sheep to a small waiting room at the end of the hallway. That room is on fire with a slew of hospital staff in scrubs and caps. Most of them have masks hanging from their necks as they buzzed around the area with clipboards and patient’s charts. One by one, they check our wristbands, confirm with the paperwork and take us away to their designated operating room.

I can’t say that I am nervous at this point but it is a little strange that I am one of the last two patients still here after all the others have been taken away.

My surgery is scheduled for 8 a.m. It’s now about 7:55. I overhear one of the nurses say that Dr. O’Grady is not here yet.

They called me yesterday morning to confirm the surgery so I’m sure he’s on his way.

Minutes later I see him walk down the hall in green scrubs and a matching cap in his hand.

“There he is,” I say to Judy.

Wow...it’s almost time

The nurse finally approaches us.

“Okay Karen, you can come with me.”

She too asks me if I need a wheelchair. Because of the weight I’ve lost so far in preparation for the surgery, my mobility has improved to the point where I know I can walk to the operating room without the assistance of a wheelchair. This makes me very proud.

Judy turns to reaches out for my partial denture and my glasses. I give her very explicit instructions.

“The first thing you do when I come out from surgery is to PUT MY TEETH back in my mouth!”

“You won’t even notice.” Judy giggles.

I snap right back at her, “Oh yes I will.”

We have a good chuckle about that.

I know we have to do this quickly. Judy hugs me really tight. She looks like she's about to cry, but stays strong. We both say I love you and I follow the nurse.

Dr. O'Grady is leaning against the front desk chatting with some other doctors in their scrubs as well. They all look happy which give me comfort. I acknowledge him with a nod as I walk past.

The nurse and I turn the corner and start down a fairly long hallway.

Geez...almost exactly one year to the day and here I am. As I walk down that long corridor, I reflect over the journey that brought me here.