

Heart To Heart #74

Broken Heart



William J. Schwartz, M.D.

Certain patients come in and brighten up the examining room. I walk in and although I know there are diseases to take care of, I feel an instant relationship beyond my role as doctor. Discussion usually starts with something about the weather, vacations, family, baseball or pictures on the wall, or floor.

I feel energized by words and thoughts, free associations a mile a minute. Eventually I find myself in warm laughter about the peculiarities and ironies of life.

Frank Landucci is one of those patients who creates those moments. I remember Frank, with his numerous problems including diabetes, hypertension, bypass surgery, stents, kidney failure and dialysis with a long list of medications, in a husky, hoarse voice asking me who was in the picture (painting) that sat on the floor behind my desk. He asked is that Ringo Starr or Bob Dylan?

The picture was a painting of a young man with long hair, a mustache and sunglasses in a blue jacket leaning against a wall. It was me. My girlfriend at college painted it in December 1970, and my wife has been hiding it in the back of a closet for 25 years. I finally took it out and brought it to the office. Keep the past in the present. We laughed about the memories of youth, old friends, wives, and the meaning of life: people and the passage of time. When we got closer to the business of medicine, and there was a lot to take care of, I felt a bit guilty—I am having too much fun—Frank gave me more than I gave back. Sometimes I would say to Frank, “you send me your bill”.

The pleasures of practicing medicine, aside from the biology and the chemistry, are the relationships. But pleasure doesn't come without sadness and more serious moments of reality.

My good patient and friend Frank Landucci died last week. I miss you Frank. The picture will never be the same.

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