

17. My Cyborg Shoulder



My Cyborg Shoulder. The doctor assured me that the two broken splinters on the right weren't going to migrate and stick me in the gizzard.

In June of 2015 I auditioned for a gig in a bar some four blocks from where I live. I played the guitar and sang for two hours and it seemed that they liked me because afterwards they hired me to play during the afternoon of the fourth of July when they were having a special party.

I wouldn't be able to make it.

Upon arriving home, I put my sound equipment in the kitchen. I didn't feel like putting it away because a year and a half before I had fallen off my bicycle and hurt my shoulder. It still hurt a little. I had had therapy,

but they weren't able to help me and finally I had to have a cat scan.

The procedure turned out to be incredibly painful. I knew that they were going to stick me in a white, porcelain-like cylinder and I had heard that patients frequently had a terrible sensation of claustrophobia when put inside. I didn't think this this would happen to me. I was wrong.

It was like being loaded head first into a cannon!

The technician showed me that the two ends of the cylinder were open and when I knew that, I was able to relax a little.

Of course, the claustrophobia wasn't painful. It was something else. If I didn't move my arm, it would begin to hurt and during the procedure the technician didn't allow me to move at all.

The pain grew.

There was a speaker in the cylinder and when the technician asked me how I was, I answered, "I'm dying!"

"You've only got ten minutes left. Don't move."

I thought I was going to die.

Afterwards, the doctor showed me the results that were on a screen although I must confess that I couldn't understand what I was looking at. She told me that I had torn off a tendon and that it was beyond the ability of any surgeon to repair it.

"The good news is that you can keep riding your bike because if you ever fall off it again, you won't be able to hurt your shoulder any more than it already is.

"Isn't there anything you can do?" I asked.

"Well, you could have a complete shoulder replacement."

I thought that she was talking about a replacement using the bones of a cadaver, and I didn't want to have anything to do with that.

"There's something else," she said. "You have torn off *two* tendons, but one appears to be an old injury and the muscles around it are atrophied.

I couldn't remember having hurt my shoulder before.

My shoulder hurt a lot but I could still play guitar at a bar Wednesdays and when a year had gone by, my shoulder stopped hurting as much as before.

On that day in June, I looked at the equipment in the kitchen. I had left some big speakers, the sound system amplifier, and other things in the central part of the room through which I was used to walking and I said to myself, "Tom, you're gonna trip over that."

That night at 11:20, I turned out the lights, walked through the kitchen, tripped over my sound system, and broke two fingers and my shoulder.

At the time I didn't know that I had broken my shoulder. It hurt, but it always did. What concerned me most were the fingers, one of which had been dislocated and was pointing to the left. It was absolutely ghastly.

I called my brother and he told me to call 911. I did and the firemen rushed to my house. They arrived with their hook and ladder truck and their ambulance, which I always used to call "The Sun Lakes Taxi."

06/29	11:20P	<u>SteveCell Phone</u>	Out	2	9pm N&W
06/29	11:21P	911	Out	3	Free Call

The Two Phone Records from That Night

The firemen seemed a little bored with it all. It surprised me a lot that they didn't talk to me much and didn't offer words of encouragement. In the past, I had always been quite impressed to see the professionalism of other firemen and the way that they reassured injured people.

"Do you have pain anywhere else?" a fireman asked, looking at my hand.

"Well," I answered. "My shoulder hurts a little."

They took me to the hospital where they cut off my favorite T-shirt with scissors and the doctor asked me, "Do I have your permission to set your finger?"

I nodded and she said that I had to answer her in words.

"Why?" I asked.

"Sometimes they break."

"All right, then," I told her. "You've got my permission."

She came up, grabbed my finger, and started yanking.

And I started screaming.

My brother told me that I woke up every patient on that floor of the hospital.

"She had guts!" my brother told me later.

The finger didn't break. In fact, if you look at the before and after pictures below, you can see that she had set it quite well.

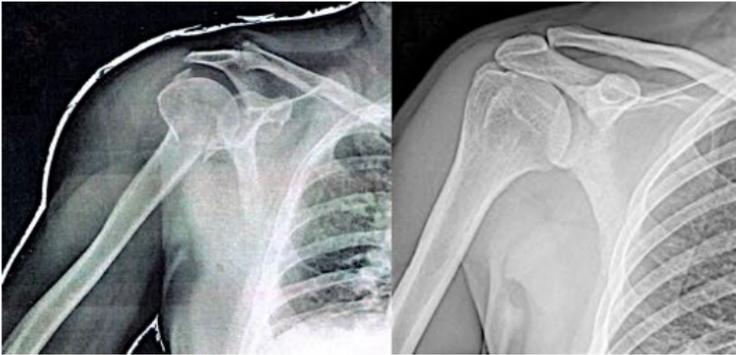


Before and After Photos

Usually when a person breaks a bone, the doctor can set it and send the patient home with their arm or leg in a cast. It wouldn't be that way for me.

They had a piece of equipment like an MRI machine. (I don't know exactly what it was.) And they scanned my body with it.

"They say you've broken your shoulder," my brother told me. "It's bad and you have to have a replacement."



My Shoulder and a Normal One

They put my hand in a splint and my arm in a sling and sent me home that very night. I had to wait ten days before the surgery. In the meantime, I went to see a hand specialist, a doctor that told me, "These fingers are going to give you more trouble than the whole shoulder."

He warned me that I had an injury that typically resulted in stiffness in the hand and that quite

possibly I would not be able to play the guitar again.

My brother talked to the orthopedic surgeon who gave him instructions that I had to follow before the surgery. He wrote: "1. no medication that morning 2. no deodorant..."

I arrived at the hospital well prepared on the day of the surgery. Before the operation, I was in a bed and my brother was in the room too. The anesthesiologist explained to me what was going to happen. Then he said, "Let's say a short prayer."

We both became furious instantly and yelled at the same time.

"No!!"

In that moment, the anesthesiologist realized that his selfish attempt to deceive and manipulate had failed. He had been caught and he knew it.

That's the last thing I remember.

What I write in my book, *The Mysterious Nights of Yesteryear*, illustrates the reason why we got so mad. It has to do with what happened when my mom was dying of cancer.

A pastor from where I don't know showed up. He was like the other buzzards of his kind that always come to roost in the trees when somebody's sick...

Out of courtesy, my mother said that he could talk to her...

I talked to my mother, who told me that she had told this pastor that she wasn't a Christian, but he didn't care. She was very weak and this cleric knew that he could take advantage of her. He took her hand and began to pray to Jesus Christ.

I went looking for him, and I aimed to kill him very slowly with my bare hands. Fortunately for this religious swine, he had left, getting away Scott free.

I didn't want my mother to spend her last day on earth being the victim of such a predator and upon awakening after the operation I was bound and determined that this anesthesiologist would never escape my wrath.

But I took a long time waking up. Perhaps this anesthesiologist had given me a double dose of anesthesia so I wouldn't remember what he tried to pull.

I dreamed about a nurse. She was a brunette, female version of Brainiac V that was sitting on a whirling chair in front of a screen that sparked and glittered. I felt pain, but since she was reading my mind, she already knew before I could tell her about it and said she had already sent the pain killers on the way. The blue of her eyes splashed across the screen.

Hours crawled by.

I had thought that someone would see me wake and say, "You've already had your operation." as

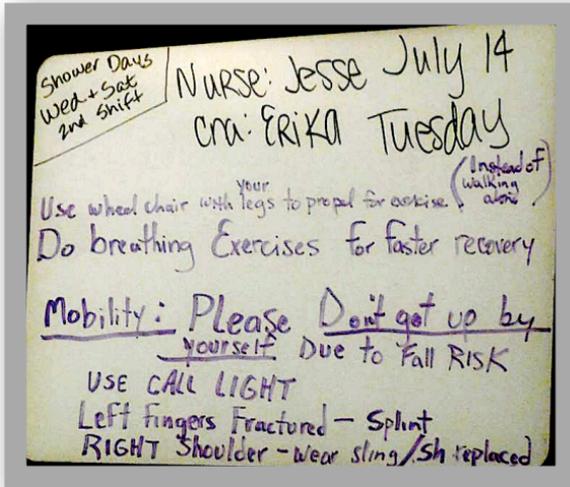
they do when someone has had sodium pentothal and hasn't had any sense of the passing of time. I thought I would have a sudden awakening.

They told me that my nephew visited me, but I don't remember that. I remember that the surgeon came to see me, but it's a blurry recollection. Was it then that he told me that he had used his thumb and index finger to lift out the head of my humerus along with the remains of my arm? No, he said that later I think.

During rehab (in which we used only Spanish), they always said things like, "I want you to lift your leg ten times. Count them off!"

But I couldn't. I literally could not count from one to ten for a week and a half.

For two weeks I was stuck in a rehabilitation facility. They refused to let me go home because I live alone and the nurses didn't want me to fall.



The Whiteboard in My Room

When I had at last gone home, nurses came every day to give me therapy. I couldn't move my arm a single inch and I couldn't lift my arm.

A nurse lifted my arm up for me. The arm had been trapped in the sling for a long time, and it longed to be free and to stretch.

"Oh, that feels great!" I told her.

She showed me how to use my left hand to lift my injured arm.

The very day I went home I bought a ukulele. The hand specialist agreed with me that it would be a good idea to start playing it instead of a guitar. At first, I couldn't even close my hand, but with a lot of therapy it began to get better and finally I

recovered the use of my hand and even played in the bar that had hired me months before.



November 11, 2015 Mulligan's Saloon

There was something else pending that I couldn't carry out until I had shaken the cobwebs from my mind. I'm talking about the date that I had with a certain anesthesiologist. At last my cerebrum recuperated and I was able to compose my complaint to the hospital and the anesthesiologist. I didn't beat around the bush.

I mailed the surgeon a letter advising him of what was going on just before surgery: that his anesthesiologist was lying in wait to proselytize with the patients. In the same envelope, I enclosed

the letter that I had written to the anesthesiologist and a half dozen of his superiors were also to receive copies, including the president and CEO of the three hospitals in the area, Tim Bricker.



I was so happy and excited with this project that I took a picture of my letters of complaint.

August 17, 2015

Dr. Scott Siebel
Chandler Anesthesia Consultants
Re: ACCT #C14.41813 and Surgery
July 10, 2015 at Mercy Gilbert Hospital
PO Box 1847
Gilbert, AZ 85299

Dear Dr. Siebel:

Your practice of asking patients to participate in religious activity is unethical. I say this assuming

that I'm not the only one you have attempted to get to pray with you.

los superiores del anestesista también iban a recibir copias incluyendo el jefe de los tres hospitales del área, Tim Bricker.

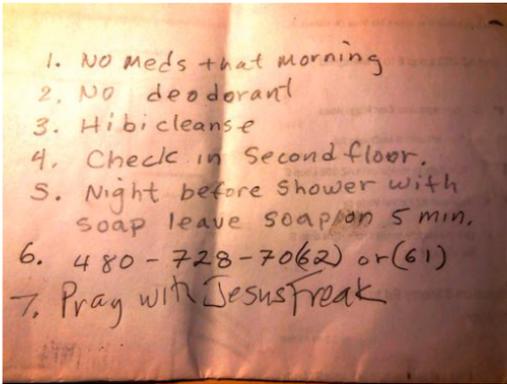
Dr. Siebel, your superiors need to know that you are taking advantage of sick and injured patients (whose religious affiliations you know absolutely nothing about) by attempting to impose your own personal devotional practices upon them. Such conduct, such willful proselytizing, is simply unacceptable anywhere.

I do not wish to have a reply from you. I do, however, wish to hear from your employers, Mercy Gilbert Hospital, Chandler Regional Medical Center, and Chandler Anesthesia Consultants. I would like to know that others will not be asked to participate in their anesthesiologist's religious activities as I was and that proper remedial and disciplinary measures will be taken to ensure that such unethical, self-serving practices will cease.

Sincerely,

Tom Cole

cc: William Paterson, Tim Bricker, Karen Byrnes, Marcia Bolks, Terry Ambus, Arizona Medical Board



The Instructions My Brother Jotted Down
I added number seven.

In the beginning of September, I received a letter from his boss.

Dear Mr. Cole:

I have received and read your complaint regarding Dr. Scott Siebel.

Knowing Dr. Siebel for many years, I am sure he does not intend malice towards anyone. Nevertheless, your dissatisfaction has been brought to his attention, and he now realizes that not everyone is comforted by prayer prior to surgery. He gave me assurance that this practice will cease immediately.

I want to thank you for bringing this forward.

Terry Ambus MD

Well, I couldn't have expected anything better. I liked the word "immediately."

On the other hand, although I understood that Dr. Ambus had to defend his employee a little and say that he didn't have bad intentions, I didn't like the idea that the anesthesiologist was an innocent who didn't understand what he was doing. He didn't deserve that pass. Scott Siebel would never have tried to pray with a patient if the surgeon had been there. He would have been caught at once and he knew that very well. The *modus operandi* of such holy rollers is to get the patient alone. That's what that pastor did with my mother years ago.

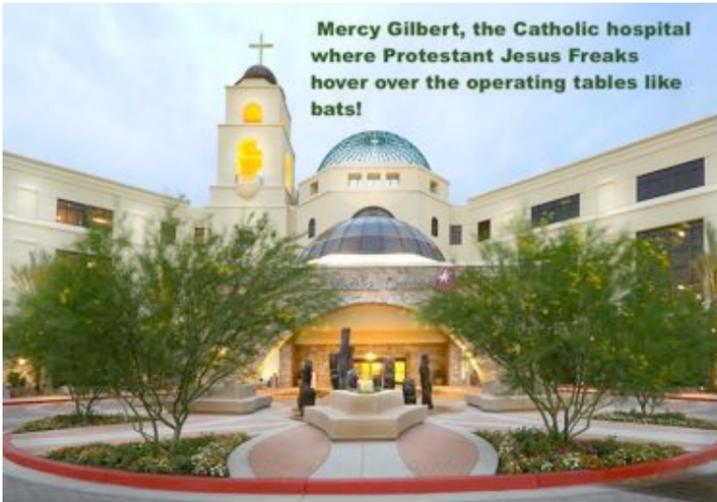
People of this lowly sort are not as stupid and naive as they would like us to believe. For Scott Siebel, it's better to be scolded as a naive child than as the predator that he is: a penny ante predator perhaps but a predator nonetheless.

I dashed off this letter.

Dear Dr. Ambus:

Just a note to thank you for your reply to my letter. I feel that you understood my concern. I also feel that you were aware of the fact that I did not make this, my first such complaint, lightly. I want you to know how much I appreciate your timely and appropriate response.

Tom Cole



Not everything was to go smoothly. I received an answer from Mercy Gilbert Hospital. It came in the form of a simplistic brush-off letter written by an first class idiot named Philip Fracica. I was furious and wrote a five-page letter disemboweling him and the hospital as well for hiring a such a simpleton. I considered it my masterpiece among all of the letters that I had written in my life and it was with great pride that I mailed it to all concerned.

*A loathsome man named Fracica
Was known from Maine to Topeka
As an oblivious pulmonologist
A litigious ideologist
And a prodigious religious apologist!*

I accused the hospital of not having the slightest idea of what a grievance procedure was and much

to my surprise one day I found that upon receiving my letter, the hospital abandoned this so-called grievance procedure entirely: the CEO of the three hospitals Tim Bricker called me to apologize.

He said that he was in total agreement with me on each issue about which I had written (and I had written quite a lot). He told me that he was Jewish and didn't like any kind of proselytizing and had even called Terry Ambus to tell him so.

I don't think he was just mollifying me at all. We talked for a half hour laughing a lot of the time.

Afterwards, something quite strange and interesting happened. It just so happened that there were a couple of things that I wished I had said to Tim Bricker. I don't know why, but this bothered me a lot and I began to imagine having run into him at a restaurant or bar and that I had the opportunity to talk to him again. I had seen his picture on the hospital's web page and so I knew I could recognize him. It was just one of those imaginings that I suppose all of us have from time to time.

One day, I decided to have a beer at a brewery called The Perch because of its many bird cages filled with exotic birds. I had played guitar there many times.

I was having an India pale ale when I spotted a short man dressed in blue jeans and a T-shirt.

"Are you Tim Bricker?" I asked him.

"That depends on who wants to know," he said smiling.



It was him. He was waiting for his wife and so we chatted for a while.

After I finished my beer, I got up to go and walked by the table where they were sitting. He waved me over and introduced me to his wife.

"Your husband read five pages of my finest rant," I told her.

Tim Bricker looked at his wife and nodded.

"It was a good rant," he said.