Waking up like a kid: parathyroidectomy for the win

written by Holly
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By Holly Lisle

Last night I put my head on my pillow, closed my eyes, and fell asleep.

When I opened them again, it was morning.



The day is mine, and the whole world in it.

That may not sound like much. So let me put it in context for you.

I remember waking up one perfect summer morning in 1966 in the tiny Ohio village where I lived. I was five.

I remember the movement of the white curtain blowing, the smell of the air—which was green and sweet, with just a touch of bleach—the sun cutting windowpane squares on the blanket and my skinny legs. I remember the sound outside my bedroom window, which was the sound of sheets and laundry flapping on

the line.

I remember bouncing out of bed, full of energy, ready for life. My thoughts, whatever they were, are lost to me now, but what I felt, summed up from the fifty years I've lived since, was this: *The day is mine, and the whole world in it*.

Time lets you work for and earn things that pay you, and if you work hard and with a plan, it pays you way out of proportion to what you give up in the innocent exuberance of being a kid: life and time have brought me a terrific husband who is my best friend, three excellent kids, writing skills, a ton of books with more still to come, and the mission and joy of teaching the writers willing to work for it how to do what I've learned to do and love so much.

But I thought that the days of waking up like a kid were behind me. I thought the sheer raw delight of opening my eyes on a new morning seeming instants after closing my eyes and falling asleep the night before were gone forever.

I assumed that the price I paid for the joy I take from every day and every minute I get to live, to love who I love and to do what I fought so hard to get to do, would be paid for by falling asleep in painful inches, waking up multiple times each night, twisting and turning to find a comfortable position, trying tricks to quiet my racing mind.

I assumed that life would be ever-expanding pain consuming me in creeping increments, and I accepted that as part of the price I had to pay for the privilege and wonder of getting to be alive.

I'd forgotten what it felt like to feel good—feeling bad had become my new good.

Turns out I was wrong.

It's now been nine days, plus a few hours as I write this,

since I had that parathyroid tumor removed.

Pain free, with my mind calm, my thoughts clear and focused, last night I climbed into bed, counted my breaths as I always do, and fell asleep so quickly I don’t even remember counting.

And I slept like a kid. After what felt like minutes later, I opened them. Sunlight outlined the verticals that cover the window.

I sat up and grinned, full of energy, full of life. No pain. No clouds. And this time, I can tell you exactly what I was thinking.

The day is mine, and the whole world in it!

Fifteen minutes changed my life. Fifteen minutes was the time it took my surgical team to make the 1.5-inch incision, remove the parathyroid tumor and check the other three glands for function, and close the incision.

My sincerest thanks to Dr. Norman, Dr. Boone, and Dr. Parrack. And my thanks, too, to the amazing staff of the Norman Parathyroid Center:

- Jayme, who helped me get set up to have the operation,
- the security guard who wished me good luck and pointed my guys and me in the right direction as I walked in to have my surgery,
- the receptionist who was so brightly cheerful at not-quite-five AM,
- woman who set up my medical records and told me how much she enjoyed working where she does (you know how rare it is to hear people say that?)
- the warm, friendly, wonderfully competent nurses who talked me clearly and concisely through what would happen,
- the young woman who wheeled me down to have a scan and

with whom I laughed about the shocking cold of the morning
- the guy who did my sestamibi scan and with whom I had a fun chat about video gaming and the superiority of the XBox One controller but the better games and selection available for Playstation 4 (including the upcoming *No Man's Sky,* though I couldn't quite sell him on that)
- and the anesthesiologist who took the time to reassure me about the anesthesia, and who's voice was the last one I heard before I woke up to a future I could not yet imagine.

I was an RN for ten years before I got the three-book deal that let me quit to write full time. I worked in a number of hospitals, knew all kinds of doctors, saw all kinds of medical care. I've experienced medical services from the other end too, as a patient and as the family member of people I love.

I never experienced – or even imagined possible – the uniformly spectacular care and professionalism of Every. Single. Person. I dealt with from the instant I contacted the clinic until the day two weeks after my surgery when I received a copy of the letter Jim Norman sent to each of my doctors, explaining what he'd done and its ramifications on my health in the future.

Dr. Norman told me, "This surgery will change your life." When he said it, I didn't even realize how much my life needed to be changed. I'm just now starting to figure that out.

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