

HOW TO PRAY

I'll never forget being wheeled away from my husband and mother at Mt. Sinai Hospital in NYC through large double gray doors bearing a diamond-shaped yellow sign reading "no visitors beyond this point." Dressed in a thin cotton gown, on a cold metal gurney, I was wheeled into my parking spot alongside other patients coming in and out of surgery. Doctors and nurses were dashing around as I lay there at 8am for my 9am surgery slot.

At noon, I called over a nurse. "Excuse me, I'm sorry to bother you but my surgery is supposed to be 12 hours long and at this point, they'll be operating on me at midnight. Can I reschedule for tomorrow?"

"Oh honey," she said, "Don't you worry about it, they do this 'awl' (NY accent) the time? Now, do you want a magazine?" At that moment, the frustration simmering deep inside began to erupt. Why did my dentists not know what was staring at them on my lateral tongue! Why did the oral surgeons not do a second biopsy and question the first!

I took my frustration out on this nurse. "Do you know, I may never speak articulately again. I may never swallow normally again; I may not recognize my own face! And, you are asking me if I want a magazine?" She backed up, apologized, and walked away. I had nowhere to direct my frustration but upwards. When you are sick, you pray, whether you believe in a higher being or not.

I looked up, gritted my teeth, and wailed inwardly, "How could you do this to me?" I stopped myself remembering wise words of a friend who said 'when you are angry, you're weak.' I wanted to be strong! I looked right back up and said, "Thank you for doing this to me and not to my children."

I lashed out again, "But why stage IV?" Again, I stopped myself. "Thank you for doctors who give me hope."

"Why my tongue, out of all the parts of this body?" I had been a professional performance artist specializing in interactive storytelling. Why my tongue?

Once again, I stopped myself. "Thank you for taking one third of my tongue and not one third of my brain." When I started to think this way, I felt strength well up in me. I looked my cancer in the eye and said, "You are not going to squat your ugly face in this vessel because I am going to fight."