

A Short story

MY LIFE'S ROOM

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*I envision my life experiences fitting
inside one large room—my life's
personal space.*

The moment we are born, we move into our life's room. As we grow, we become more aware of this space. At adulthood, we realize we have choices for how to organize our room and live in it. Most important, nothing that enters this room can ever leave it, because it has become a permanent part of us. As we live our lives, this room will fill with our good and bad experiences. These represent our history, our legacy.

My room is tidy and organized, and this reflects who I am. Thankfully, I learned the basics of organization at an early age. In my room there are no closets and no shelves to hide things in or on—everything is out in the open, and it is up to me to keep it all manageable and tidy. The windows in my room are large and beautiful. The view out of every one is perfect. These windows are my lenses to the outside world, and I'm careful not to block the views from them with clutter or grime. At times, I am compelled to draw the shades in order to regroup and reflect. Often I must accept things I can't control. I am only human and prone to mistakes and regrets as well as moments of happiness and pride in my achievements. Like everyone, though, I am also subject to unfortunate circumstances that appear out of nowhere and are often unfair.

Tucked in the far corner of my room, out of the way of everything else, are sealed boxes of different sizes. Some are large, some small. The large ones sit in a corner, with the smaller ones on top. I am always careful to keep my boxes as neat and tidy as possible.

Inside the largest boxes are the harshest challenges I have faced—they must be in the background to keep them out of clear view. They must stay inside my boxes if I am to continue to live peacefully.

Among the most notable of the large boxes—the ones closest to the floor—are two that contain what were the most difficult trials of my life.

The first was my nightmare journey through infectious eColi ESBL. Infections of this type can be wide-ranging, from urinary tract to severe blood poisoning.

Often drug resistant, they can be challenging to treat. It took me three excruciatingly long years to pack, seal, and place that box where it belongs. Mindful at every moment that my mortality was only a bacteria mutation away, I was happy in 2018 to seal it up and move it to the corner.

Stacked on top of the eColi ESBL box is my head-and-neck-cancer box. When my cancer was first diagnosed, that box was a mess. Bits and pieces of my diagnosis, treatment, and outcome lay scattered throughout my room. I describe each day during that horrible time as like an onion being peeled, adding layer after layer of mess, tears, and uncertainty to the inside of my room. Eventually the onion began to disappear, with no layers left to peel. But then I had to confront the emotional mess scattered across the floor that blocked my view of the world and did not allow me to move freely around my room.

Picking up the pieces of my cancer-shattered life and putting them into the proper large box and corner was time consuming and extremely hard. I had to choose to deal with it or not. Painfully, I chose to deal with it. My cancer experience contained torturous—almost unbearable—memories of my diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. At that time all I knew was that my life's room needed to be cleaned up and sorted out—I had to put the bad things away in order to move on.

Over time, my strong will is what sustained me and my cancer experience was finally packed up and moved out of my immediate view.

These two life-significant boxes will always be present in my room. They serve as constant reminders of my eColi ESL and cancer ordeals. The other smaller boxes in that corner contain challenges that have helped to shape

my life and serve as constant reminders of bad choices and mistakes I've made. But as time goes by, I hardly ever glance at those smaller boxes because I have grown accustomed to them being in that corner of my room. Over time I can only hope my eColi ESBL and head-and-neck-cancer boxes will end up that way, too.

Now we are all faced with a global pandemic that has entered each of our life's rooms. Uncertainty is running amok. For the first time in my life, I've realized that sometimes it takes more strength to live than to die. Unknowns of the pandemic are forcing us to walk a tightrope across a deep ravine--one small slip and down we go!

Right now I'm planning for how to get myself and those I love across that tightrope to the other side--but not in the traditional way. To protect us from the coronavirus, we are following the rules that have been globally mandated--social distancing, staying at home, constantly washing our hands. As we slowly--and sometimes painfully--cross the ravine to safety, I can place a new box in a corner of my life's room to fill with unprecedented memories.

As I continue to look out the windows of my life, I can say, "I've been there."