

MIND TO MIND

*Creative writing that explores the abstract side
of our profession and our lives*

Carol Wiley Cassella, M.D., Editor

Trauma Fifty-Four

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Thank you, Trauma Fifty-Four. Although our encounter was extremely brief, you had such an impact on all of us. You never said a word. There was never any eye contact. I didn't even know your name until the next day when it was broadcast on the local news. You left this world, only 34 minutes after we met. At that moment, I noticed a hand gently caressing your head. Behind me was the sound of nurses and technicians as they quietly sobbed. Those in front of me seemed frozen in time. It was not until my own tears were absorbed by my surgical mask that my eyes and mind cleared enough to realize that it was my hand that was on your head. You came to us in the wee hours of the night at a time when most were snuggled in the warmth and comfort of their beds. Thirty-four minutes later, it was time for the people who came in to help care for you to go home. For those of us who had to stay, it was time to prepare for the next case.

Something different happened. No one would leave you. We were there for you. We were there for each other. Your hand was held. Your forehead was stroked. You were bathed and your hair was neatened. As the nurses in the operating room did all of this, my thought was that of family members cleansing and anointing the body of a deceased loved one prior to burial. Your Mom would be visiting you shortly. The nurses hopefully helped your Mom, and certainly helped themselves, in dealing with their grief. While I cannot possibly quantitate the sorrow that your Mom is feeling, I hope she finds some comfort knowing that you were not alone.

There were upwards of 20 people in your operating room that night. For many of them, including myself, this was not the first time we faced a

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situation and outcome such as this. What differed though was how we reacted. Everyone was touched by your gift to us. We are in times of great uncertainty. Each day we live with healthcare reform, efficiency, throughput, and cost containment. Each day we deal with disease, sickness, and sometimes death, so we are continually reminded of the fragility of life. Early Sunday morning, in just thirty-four minutes, you put things into perspective for us. You not only reminded us of how fragile life really is, but you also reminded each of us why we chose this profession in the first place and, despite what we consider an unsuccessful outcome, you validated what we do each and every day. You were not alone that night, Trauma Fifty-Four. Twenty people who you touched were there with you. I'm sure your Mom and Dad are proud of you and I hope this information brings them some ease. Those of us with you that early morning will be forever grateful to you.