

## **A Piece of My Mind - When You Come Into My Room**

**When you come into my hospital room,**  
you need to know the facts of my life  
that there is information not contained in my hospital chart  
that I am 40 years married, with 4 children and 4 grandchildren  
that I am "genetically Lutheran"... with gut disease, like Luther  
himself  
that I am a professor  
that I teach teachers, priests, sisters how to nurture faith in the  
next generation  
that I love earthy sensuous life, beauty, travel, eating, drinking  
J&B scotch, the theater, opera, the Chicago Symphony, movies,  
all kinds, water skiing, tennis, running, walking, camping  
that I love loving, the wonder and awe of sexual intimacy  
that I enjoy gardening, smell of soil in misty rain and scorching  
sun  
that I have led a chronic illness group for 12 years

**When You come into my room,**  
you need to know the losses of my life  
that I have Crohn's disease and 3 small-bowel resections  
that I have been hospitalized more than a dozen times for partial  
bowel obstruction  
that I am chronically ill, and am seeking healing, not cure  
that my disease has narrowed my life, constricted it  
that I once fantasized but no longer dream about being president  
of Concordia or Mundelein College  
that I can no longer eat fresh salads or drink a glass of wine  
that I love teaching but sometimes have no energy left at the end  
of the day  
that my Crohn's disease is active in the fall and spring, cyclically  
in tune with my work  
that when I was to give my presidential address to the Association  
of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education, I was in  
the hospital for surgery  
that when a colleague read my speech, I felt professionally dinin-  
ished  
that I can travel only where there is modern technology ... I need  
fiberoptic intubation

**When You come into my room,**  
you need to know my body  
that I am afraid of medical procedures done at night ... I awake  
fearfully to 10 feet of air in an IV tube ... I kick the tube and call ...  
nurses come quickly ... but I will not forget ... and my body  
remains sleepless in any hospital  
that I know the loss of 25 pounds, not recorded in my chart ... I  
had to beg for a subclavian catheter for additional nutrition before  
I received one  
that I am afraid of fifth-year residents ... they tell me if my intestine  
does not open in 4 more days, I will have to have another surgery  
... information not helpful or useful  
that I am on Pentasa, prednisone, Bentyl, Questran, vitamin B12,  
Relafen ...more than 20 pills each day ... if I remember  
that I hate rounds held outside my room, rounds that do not  
include nurses, my wife, my children, my pastor, or even me  
...rounds done over me, around me, but not with me  
that this body seems battered, old, vulnerable, tired ... but still me  
that I live by medication  
that I live by technology  
that I live by waiting, in the eternal "advent season" of doctors'  
offices

**When You come into my room,**  
you need to know my heart  
that I am emotional ... a fully functioning feeling person  
that I am afraid of the NG tube, sometimes wrapped in my mouth,  
clogged  
that I fear surgery, each time that I once felt I could not breathe in  
recovery

that I fear awakening from surgery with an ostomy  
that with each partial obstruction I am anxious about another  
surgery  
that I have lost confidence in my body  
that I experience sadness and depression more often now than  
before the disease  
that many persons chronically ill consider suicide, I am one of them  
that the advent of symptoms is scary and debilitating  
that I am angry at life's unfairness: my brother, older, eats too much  
drinks too much plays too much and is healthy, always healthy so  
too my wife and it seems also my colleagues ... like I once was but  
am no longer, ever  
that I worry about the future ... insurance  
that I am anxious about aging and how I will cope  
that I long for one perfect day, only one symptom-free 24 hours  
that I lust for remission  
that being sick is narcissistic, boring, dull, painful  
that there are times I want to give up

**When You come into my room,**  
you need to know my mind and my spirit  
that I seek meaning in suffering that suffering is the nudge to the  
religious question  
that I have faith and lose it that I cling to my faith in spite of all  
evidence opposite  
that I am trapped by the struggle for meaning yet engaged by it  
that I am slowly coming to believe  
that meaning is what we bring to suffering, not what we gain from it  
that God, faith, meaning, ultimate concern, love, salvation are the  
being of my being  
that I struggle with God  
that Job was more just than God  
that in my religious quest words are important, music is a mirror to  
my soul, and Eucharist, the stuff of mystery  
that I believe deeply  
that I need to engage suffering  
that disease forces the God question and nurtures the Godless  
response that illness focuses the issue of death

**When You come into my room,**  
you need to sustain my hope You need to know  
that I believe love wins over hate, hope over despair, life over death  
that I hope against hope  
that I pray and believe prayer heals  
that some days I am able to make meaning of suffering  
that I am more gentle, more compassionate, better with dying, more  
loving, more sensitive, deeper in grief and in joy  
Sit at my 'mourning bench" if you are my physician listen to me, talk  
truthfully to me  
you need to know all this if you want to heal me  
And bear my rage about my disease  
that I will never be cured  
that my daughter has Crohn's disease and is only 33 years old that  
she too has had her first surgery and lives with many of my feelings  
and I am angry and sad  
And support my hope that tomorrow there may be new medicines  
that today you care deeply  
that you will do your best

**When you come into my hospital room,**  
promise me presence  
promise me a healing partnership  
keep hope alive  
it is all I have.

Stephen A. Schmidt, EdD Chicago, Ill