

Writing | Symposium 2022

By Caroline Yao

I do not remember much about the night, bounded to a stretcher, delirious with pain. With every movement, the pressure on the fluid-filled sacs hanging from my arms and legs lit my skin on fire. Inevitably, they burst, soaking my clothing and leaving me to ride another wave of pain. The parts where previous sacs had burst left raw, bloody skin exposed. Those wounds stung when they rubbed against my loose bandages. But none of it mattered, for I had finally arrived at Stanford Hospital, where I had hoped to find a solution.

It took an agonizing few days to get here. I was initially diagnosed with acute dermatitis. Later, they told me it was Bullous Pemphigoid, a condition so rare that my local dermatologist has only ever seen it in textbooks. The cause for the condition was unclear, but prompt administration of morphine and a good dose of steroids worked wonders, and the rest of the night was a blur.

Today is like the past three days. The doctors keep encouraging me to be active so I do not put pressure on the fluid-filled sacs on my body. Even though it hurt to move, I have chosen to slowly walk my laps in my room. I keep checking the clock for lunch time as I complete my laps for the day. Lunch is my piece of heaven. I love bantering with catering staff and eating the delicious food here. Coincidentally, it is followed by one of my other favorite activities these days--- talking to the dermatologists. The dermatologists, with their white coats and notebooks, always form a semi-circle around me. They nod compassionately, listen to my questions, and make me feel taken care of. They remind me of my progress often, always leaving me brimming with optimism after their visit. In the last couple days, they have been the bearer of good news. As part of my recovery, I have had to stop taking my hot showers. Yesterday, I nearly leaped out of my chair when they told me I would be able to take a shower in several days.

Since my hospitalization, I have received many well-wishes and flowers. One very special person among the well-wishers is my intake nurse. I was her last patient assigned before her vacation, and her first patient back from vacation. My serious condition had weighed heavily on her during break. When she came into my room, she and I both had tears in our eyes as we embraced each other. Her relief upon seeing pain-free warmed my heart, and her compassion illuminated me that day.

Finally done with my laps, I take a well-deserved break, savor the sunshine, and reflect on all the people who have made my time at Stanford Hospital an unforgettable experience.