

Words just spill out in anesthesia stupor

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The instructions read: swallow four tablets, drink magnesium citrate and block out the entire night to remain close by the bathroom – “home base,” as Kramer referred to it in “Seinfeld.” This is one of the joys of getting older.

No one likes prepping for the procedure. But once you’ve weathered a tough night and are hooked up to an IV, you don’t remember anything. Yet I worried what I might say as the anesthesia wore off. “What if I’m mean?” I asked my wife beforehand.

“You’re not nasty any other time,” Teri said. “Why would you start now?” Still, she conceded, one’s true personality is revealed when there are no inhibitions. That only added to my stress.

As I lay on the gurney, backside exposed to the world, a timid nurse searched my hand for a spot to stab the IV. She tied off my right wrist, gently tapping my skin like I was a leper. Nothing there, so she switched to the left hand. I clenched and unclenched my fist. When she finally poked me, she didn’t hit the vein, and that freaked me out. She had to summon a veteran nurse, Kathy, who grabbed the right hand and inserted the needle in seconds.

Then I was told the doctor would be delayed 15 minutes, even though I was his first appointment. I lay there, watching my blood pressure creep up on the digital monitor.

“He’s never on time,” the nurse confided. “I don’t know why they schedule him for 8 a.m.”

Finally arriving, the doctor offered a rote apology, then hooked up the drip. “See you on the other side,” I said.

When I came to, Teri sat next to me. I sipped cranberry juice through a straw, asked for more and was refused. Three nurses stood beyond the curtain, but they seemed far away. One of them wore dark blue scrubs, face concealed behind a surgical mask. That’s all I remember.

That night, after the fog wore off, Teri recounted my behavior.

“We need a meaningful discussion,” I had told my wife, then asked her to marry me. We’re already married, she assured me, to which I replied thoughtfully, “Good. That’s good. I like you.”

Then I bellowed, “The mousey nurse doesn’t know how to find a vein. Kathy’s the only one who knows what she’s doing around here. The doctor’s never on time.”

Teri glanced at the nearby nurses, calculating damage control, as my babbling continued.

“You referred to one nurse as a man and a pig,” Teri explained, “and said something about the 1950s.” In a desperate effort to save face, my wife suggested that men had been pigs since before the 1950s. Each nurse had smiled.

A light bulb went on. I’m a huge “Seinfeld” fan, and often quote dialogue from the sitcom. There are any number of hospital scenes, but I must have noticed the scrubs and referenced an episode where Kramer wanders into the wrong room, convinced he stumbled upon a pigman: “Half man, half pig. The government’s been experimenting with pigmen since the ’50s ... It’s a military thing!”

Neither Teri nor the nurses are versed in that. They simply saw me insulting one of their finest.

“Everyone else got a second cup of cranberry juice except you,” Teri said.

So to that nurse, I apologize. I meant no insult, truly. You’re neither man nor pig. I didn’t get a good look because your face was covered, but you’re probably quite lovely. I was too busy proposing to my wife to notice.