

Roadkill and Lifesavers

A recent August caregiving weekend with my older sister, Linda, was another adventure!

First thing Saturday morning, I entered Linda's bedroom and found her paper-toweling the wet countertop of the hutch that sits by her doorway. She keeps her medications there, and somehow during the night, an uncapped bottle had tipped over. Tea, broth, or another liquid? I couldn't tell from the slightly sour odor. While Linda moved her medications, I removed clutter, first to the floor, then to the steps-away dining room table. After we mopped and cleaned the countertop, the wood remained damp.

I suggested, "We'd better give it a day to dry. Meantime, what if you organize your medications, and I sort out the clutter?" We agreed.

Not long after, we found roadkill. That's what I decided to call it so we could laugh. I had noticed Linda a bit distressed. I moved to the back of her scooter to see where she was pointing. A banana, meant to be her snack, sprawled on the floor, tire track through its width, guts spilled on the tile. We laughed, and I cleaned the floor.

In the afternoon Linda told me about her previous weekend's day-trip with her older son and nine-year-old granddaughter to Mount Scott in southern Oklahoma.

Linda asked, "Do you know how long it had been since I was at Mount Scott?"

She went on, "Not since I was nine and in the hospital. I could see the top whenever someone helped me from my bed to the window. I looked out that window at Mount Scott every chance I got. It looked so beautiful. When I was discharged four months later, I begged Dad and Mother to take me to the top of Mount Scott. They did, and I'll always remember that trip to the top and getting to see the mountain up close."

Linda's age now? 77.

Several times that weekend, Linda talked more about her hospital stay and Mount Scott. Listening, I learned she had spent one night in our hometown (Chickasha) hospital before moving to the new Southwestern Hospital in Lawton, an hour's drive away.

Linda explained, "The hospitals were full. There were no beds in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, anywhere. Polio was everywhere. I got in at Lawton because a new hospital had opened."

I looked online and learned Southwestern Hospital opened March 16, 1952.

"Mother and Dad couldn't come often. They had little ones—you and Frances—at home to look after."

"How did you pass the time?" I asked.

"Medical procedures and treatments. One time they clamped something on my head, and I couldn't move. You remember things like that."

Linda added, "Without my third and fourth grade teachers, I wouldn't have made it. They saved my life. They worked hard to catch me up."

"I became a surgeon to help people. Like doctors helped me."

Yes, ours was an adventure-filled weekend, from ridiculous laughter at a run-over banana to grateful tears for lifesaving teachers and doctors.