

Gratitude was now a potent warrior trait with a secret power: expanding my view of my circumstances just enough to help me reframe them.

But no amount of “reframing” I did, on the canvas or on my warrior’s journey, could change my physical reality: I left Yale with a new paintbrush and an old fistula. Wasn’t going back to the hospital supposed to fix everything? I kept painting the days away, sometimes to feel, decorate the house, kill time, keep my mind off my leaking wound, or fill the lonely, empty space that still surrounded me. I painted to visualize hope, but with every stroke, I was losing faith that any doctor had an answer. My patience was beyond thin. The *TODAY* show couldn’t have called at a better time.

No, it wasn’t a radical *Medical Mysteries Solved!* segment. I was pacing circles around the kitchen in one of my “I’m numbing out to this fistula and my monotonous life” modes. As usual, NBC’s the *TODAY* show was blaring, and with every lap, I heard a few cut up phrases from personalities that had grown quite familiar. It had to be 10 a.m. My mother watched the *TODAY* show with Kathie Lee and Hoda like clockwork.

“Mom! What’s this segment?”

She hardly looked up from her magazines. “*Everyone Has a Story*. They do it once a month. Really sweet—they find an inspiring story and then write a song for that person. Who did they do this time?”

My inner musical theatre ham couldn’t help but interject. “How do I get on that?”

“Oh, Amy.” And then she realized I wasn’t joking. “Amy, I’m already proud of you.”

I just kept staring at her.

“Let’s wait until you’re all healthy before we start telling the world about this.”

My stare continued. So did my dripping fistula. What did “all healthy” mean, and how could I ever get there?

“I’ll be in the art studio.” Controlling what I could, but not expecting much.

What I definitely didn’t expect? A call from the *TODAY* show producer a month later.

“Is this Amy and Marilyn? We read your story, and we’re happy to consider you as a finalist for our “Everyone Has a Story” segment. I’m going to put you on hold for a minute, and Kathie Lee is going to ask you a few questions.”

Mom and I turned to giddy, silly putty as we nervously waited for that famous voice—talking to us! Kathie Lee actually confirmed we weren’t a finalist but going to appear on the show.

“Amy and Marilyn, we’re excited to have you on the show,” Kathie Lee said. “David Friedman and I have written a great song for you. Can’t wait to meet you both soon!”

Before we knew it, my mother and I were in a cab to Rockefeller Center, actually happy that we had no idea what was in store. We were welcomed to the backstage area of the studio, for our “television prep.”

My hair was being done with a curling iron for the first time in years—since I had last done theatre. My mom sat in the backstage chair next to me, nervously holding my hand as we chatted with the makeup crew. How did we get ourselves into this, and why were we being treated like queens for the day? My dad was chuckling with another friendly voice from the NBC team. As we walked past the dressing rooms, it started to sink in: “I’m going to talk about my story on national television.”

Kathie Lee and Hoda rushed backstage briefly to introduce themselves. I even managed to leave two canvases I had painted for them by their dressing rooms. Each featured a woman

in a cocktail dress leaping across a hill—with a wine bottle in hand, of course. (This will make sense for anyone who’s seen their 10 a.m. segment!)

A commercial break started as my mom, my dad, and I were summoned into the filming area and onto a couch in its own light. Before I even had a chance to process this foreign realm, more lights came on. We were introduced, live, and I saw my mother read her letter on a separate screen. We were thrown a few questions quicker than I knew how to respond, and before could process my own answers, Heidi Blinkenstaff took the stage in front of us to sing a song from my perspective written by Kathie Lee herself and that same accompanist I had saw on this segment a month ago, David Friedman. The brassy, up-tempo song, *Still Alive*, was nothing like I expected, yet every grateful sentiment that felt real: “*Guess what? I’m still alive. I’m still here, by my will...*”

Another commercial break, and with our mouths still open, we were asked what we thought of the song. “It’s so me!” I said.

Our segment ended as abruptly as we had been rushed onto the couch. My mom and I celebrated what we still couldn’t believe had just taken place by browsing all the shops near Rockefeller Center. As we twirled around hangers and danced through aisles, I couldn’t help taking out my phone, where I was instantly inundated with hundreds of Facebook friend requests. Suddenly, everyone wanted to know more about the “girl whose stomach exploded.” *How did you survive without a stomach? How did you sustain yourself if you couldn’t eat or drink for years? Had this ever happened to anyone before?*

No, it hadn’t. But as bizarre as my story was, I could show them the person behind the “medical miracle.” I was turning outward, and now I felt like the world was watching. I had a *public* place in the world, and I was ready for it! Just like my art show had ended and the canvases were packed away, we eventually did have to leave New York City and drive back home. I felt that same well of tears I had felt after “*Journey Into Daylight*” had officially become a memory, and the fear that once I “left,” I’d never be able to rejoin the world again. Yet this time, something was different. It wasn’t just that the world knew about “my story” now. I had created a path.