

Close encounter with end of life

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As I was preparing to leave Australia to sort out the mess in Fiji, I packed boxes of the last of my possession and decided to ship them over, regardless. If it meant I left it all behind then so be it. It would enforce a totally clean slate.

I organised for a courier to collect the boxes and take them to the shipping agent. That afternoon he came to my daughter's house where the boxes were stored. We introduced each other and chatted a little about where the boxes were going as we loaded a few onto the tray of his ute.

He went to pick up the fourth box but stopped and grabbed his wrist, standing upright. I asked if he was ok and he just nodded then headed over to his ute to lean on the side.

I asked again, and he said "I'm ok."

He certainly wasn't. He grabbed at his shoulder, his left shoulder walking back towards me, looking very red in the face. I cleared a space for him to sit on an esky, which he did, but whatever pain he was in seemed to be intensifying so I encourage him to edge down onto the ground in case he fainted.

He began to wheeze, I asked if he had a phone, he indicated his car and I ran to get it. It was unlocked and I called 000.

As he lay on the ground, my mind raced trying to fathom why 000 was asking me what state I was in (of course, I am in a state of panic but I am not calling about me) he began to convulse. I tried to hold him so he wouldn't bash his head on the concrete. He was flailing and his arms were jerking erratically. His legs slightly but his flailing arms were hitting up against the metal edges of the esky and the boxes around him. I was concerned of the damage he was doing to himself. This is while checking for medical bracelet or chain and responding to questions on the phone.

'What is his name?'

"Jim."

"Jim, who?"

"I don't know, he is a courier driver, he just arrived, I don't know him."

"Ok, ok."

"Do you know if he is on any medication?" (Why on earth would I know that?)

I asked Jim but he was in no state able to respond to me.

I felt like saying refer to the previous answer, but I didn't.

"He isn't responding and I don't know him."

He seemed to settled down the red draining from his face but he had lost consciousness. I watched his chest and could see no rise or fall, there was no breath under his nose.

I panicked further saying, "I am losing him," into the phone.

Telling them he has stopped breathing, reaching for his chest with the heel of my left hand, under his diaphragm, I pushed down. Once, nothing, twice, nothing, third time - an exhale, and a breath in. His lips were coated with foam from his convulsions so I could see the movement of breath.

"He is breathing again."

"Good, good, you are doing well."

"How far away is the ambulance?"

"Not far, less than 5 minutes now."

"Oh good."

"Can you turn him into the recovery position?"

"Ok, Jim, I am going to turn you on your side, ok."

A slight flicker of response and as I turned him, he moved his arm to help.

"Oh, he responded, he helped, Jim, Jim, I am on the phone to get an ambulance, you've had a turn.

Can you hear me?"

A slight nod of his head.

I soothed his back.

"Keep him conscious, don't let him fall asleep."

"Ok, Jim you have to stay with me, don't go to sleep, just rest, ok?"

He nodded again.

This went on for some time until he finally spoke to me.

The ambulance arrived just after this. Emergency services stayed on the line with me till the ambulance officers walked in. Without realising at the time, this act was what kept me focused.

I handed over to the paramedics to assess him. They asked him the question, none to me. I went to get him a pillow.

They monitored his heart. I listened to the story he told them, he had a sore arm and he sat down, then he lay himself down.

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"Did you lose consciousness, Jim?"

"No."

I interrupted.

"He did."

They turned their attention to me, like they just realised I was there. I told them what happened.

By the time they left, I had called his work and informed them. I moved his car across the street, and I sent his glasses, phone and keys with him in the ambulance.

He called out a thank you as they took him in the gurney to the ambulance on the street.

I was shaken and in need of a stiff drink. Lost for what to do next, that little experience had thrown me. I was disorientated as the situation had been diffused and the panic deflated.

It just wasn't his time to go and I was there to facilitate that.

The next courier driver arrived, curious. He told me Jim was a heavy smoker, he was 65 and married.

I knew more about him after the event than I did 30 minutes before, having never met him. Those 30 minutes were intense and life changing, probably, for both of us.