

BREATHE
By Chris Stein

The doctor gave me three options. I could be tubed (a.k.a intubation). I could maintain the status quo. Or I could be shot up with morphine. Admittedly, my eyes lit up at the thought of an opiated stream of blood feeding my head. However, the doctor was quick to shoot that white horse when he made it clear that I'd be riding high off a cliff. So, with a jerk of the knee from a jolt of reality, I opted for the tube down the throat.

The flatscreen hung on the far wall. When it turned on, a large pink circle lit the display. The circumference was traced in silver. Inside were the letters LG in a proprietary font. Beneath the logo, in an understated white font, loomed the words "Life's Good ". The caption was disproportionately small to what I saw in front of me.

A clock hung to the left of the screen. It hung in a clockwise skew. Time was off kilter. The minute hand pointed due south. A few degrees to the right of six. The hour hand pointed between the two and three. Due east.

To my right, was a pole of gadgetry entwined in tubing. The tube started from the wall hissed and whirred oxygen around up and down and through the different mechanisms into an accordion-like hose capped off by two hollow fangs stuck up my nose. A torrent of air blew up my schnoz down my gullet into my lungs. My phone was on my stomach. It rose with every inhale. It sunk into every exhale.

I understood everything around me. I understood where I was. I understood everything behind me. I understood everything ahead of me. I understood my status quo; There was only one thing I didn't understand. Death. All I had to do was breathe. Maintain the status quo. The doctor returned. I took a deep breath, stiffened my knee and I backed out of the pulmonary invasion deal. I want my last breath to be mine.

I took my evening meds and I fell asleep. I don't remember what I dreamt, but I have no doubt I breathed throughout. I woke the following morning. The Life's Good flatscreen was on. It remained on through the night. The clock was in its same skew. The minute hand pointed due north. A few degrees left of the twelve. The hour hand pointed at the nine. A few degrees above due west. The phone remained on my stomach. Up with my inhale. Down with my exhale. The status quo.

I have no doubt that your faith and your rope-burned hands helped pull me from the brink. It could have been Divine Intervention that kept my noodle from wrapping itself around the concept of dying. From where I lay, I saw no light. I saw no Hand of God halting me at the gate. Not even a knock on the door. Faith is not to be understood. Faith just is.

I have no idea in what direction I'm going after my last breath. If I go nowhere, I'll be in the dark for eternity. If I go up into the clouds, I'll surf the heavens for eternity with my wagon hitched to Mother Theresa's habit. If I go down into the fire, I'll roast marshmallows with Adolf's pitchfork for eternity and make s'mores. If I reincarnate as a gnat, I'll go where the wind takes me until the wind splats me into a windshield.

In the words of the late Jim Morrison: "No One Here Gets Out Alive"