

Best to be careful who you tell this story. Parts may not fit Hippocrates' idea of an oath to guide medical doctors' ethics, or patients' pledge to fall over and allow any person with a stainless steel scalpel and a gauze mask to cut off what they please from their bodies.

For the moment, I am in an Austin hotel, hoping seven days of hiccupping have been relieved by a mild tranquilizer long enough to write. The plague started the third day after surgery over at the Heart Hospital a few blocks away.

Every nurse and maid on the floor offered free-choice home remedies, ranging from drinking stump waters to holding your breath with sugar dissolving under your tongue ... The white caps ignored the rule against doctoring or prescribing for patients. Hiccupping seems to be exempt above and beyond any bounds or binds on anyone's turf.

For a side light, one of the white caps brought in a news story about a lady in Florida or California, or maybe Las Vegas, who hiccupped for five weeks. She was back in the news on a murder charge. The reporter didn't research

the facts enough to know the hiccoughs probably caused her to commit the crime in hopes the act would cure her.

I tried to tell the doctor who prescribed a mild tranquilizer (and she was the first professional willing to write her remedy down), that rarely can a herder be tranquilized. We live in such emotional storms of whopping our chaps with our own hats and stomping on our hats in dismay that scientists claim they'd rather try to calm marine iguanas or a Komodo dragons once a sheep or cow rancher becomes upset.

I continued and told my first licensed doctor that similar hiccoughing cases pop up around the tables in Las Vegas, where hombres insist on playing 100-to-one shots on tilted roulette wheels. But they may be some ol' boy from the ranch country who came in the glitter of the gambling joints and overdid the free cocktails while looking for a hedge to betting on hollow horns.

The doctor laughed. She said "At least you haven't lost your sense of humor." About that time a wracking hiccup spasm hit, jerking and wrenching so far down in my diaphragm that my arms contracted so tense and tight, the face line became a forced smile.

Without adieu, she tore off the prescription blank. She left out whether to come back if I wasn't better in 10

days or 10 years. She's bound to have known I was a live member of the human race. She practices medicine in the same office as my daughter and has for 30 years.

This hotel room stays plenty private. Now and then, some of the family will drift in to tell ol' Dad he looks better when he can hold up his head from hiccoughing long enough to see his face.

My son Ben felt so sorry about the ordeal he took off five days to fish down on the Coast. Before, on an earlier surgery, Ben spent every morning for three weeks in my hospital room.

He arrived at the Coast to find red fish running in the Bay shallows – his favorite fishing spot. Perfect weather and his first choice for a partner, a lady from Austin, made the setup ideal to catch a boat full of big red fish.

But for the first time in his adult life, his timing was off so bad he couldn't set the hook from the effect of being around my hiccoughs, jerking every minute and the hic tuning up for a worse reaction. He said it was same as fishing with a hook without a barb. He said he'd set back for a big one and barely feel a tug on his line before the bait flew up out of the water.

All I could offer over the wire, (and no one wants to listen to a hiccough victim) was to hold his breath, like half of the population of Austin, Texas claimed stopped the hiccoughs.

After three pills, the last night became calm with only an outbreak now and then. Short elevator rides gave some relief. The shaft was far enough away from the front desk that the room clerk couldn't hear the runs. Hotel maids, off or on duty, sure weren't bothering an Anglo under such an obvious curse.

By noon, all was well except a sore chest. Visitors returned to comment on how my color had improved. No one sat close. Like the maids, I think they knew I wasn't contagious, but might be a bad luck piece - a Jonah.

Ben didn't have to take any pills to regain his fishing skill. Once he knew I was all right, he began to catch fish - more than he needed to bring home.