

August 31, 2016

BOSTON, you've been good to me.

I arrived here in an ambulance, nine years ago in the middle of the night, as soon as a bed at Brigham and Women's Hospital became available.

In the ambulance I was manic with denial. I remember being wheeled in on a gurney and thinking the hospital resembled a mall. Two eager residents met me in that shiny lobby, admired the flowers I clung to from my short-lived Cape Cod summer romance, then wheeled me to the elevator.

I arrived with an infection, I joked, "from a bikini wax gone wrong." I didn't realize how teaching hospitals work and didn't know I could resist having all of those fresh-faced male student doctors investigate my infection, which looked ghastly, and was in a sensitive location. Each of them cringed as they peeked underneath the sheet between my knees. I pretended not to be humiliated and wondered when they would develop the poker faces of professionals.

Turned out the infection had a wretched cause: acute myelogenous leukemia. There I was, 26, stuck in the hospital, my blood betraying me.

But I was lucky, because of all the places to find out you have a nasty case of blood cancer, Boston was the place to be. As is said in the vernacular: people are *wicked smaht* here.

And Massachusetts is a most generous state. I had a master's degree, school debt, a job at a coffee shop and an unpaid internship at a radio station – a recipe for being uninsured – which I was. But in 2007, not only had Massachusetts passed a law that required every resident to have insurance, it also had progressive laws that allowed for single women without children to qualify for Medicaid. That was the category I fell into. I remember not long after I arrived to the hospital when a woman walked into my room, asked me to sign some papers and voila, I was insured.

Massachusetts, you've been good to me.

While I was in the hospital, the Red Sox were in the World Series. On the mound was Jon Lester, who only one year before had undergone treatment for blood cancer. I watched him clinch the win from my hospital room, my brother and our friend flanking me, a pizza box covering my legs.

Even though I was too old to be a Jimmy Fund kid, I was invited to batting practice at Fenway before a game, where a "Red Sox Ambassador" handed me an envelope with tickets inside – but these weren't just any tickets – they were then-president Larry Lucchino's personal seats. At the bottom of the eighth, Larry Lucchino himself came to meet me.

Can you imagine a Yankee's owner doing that?

Yes, I landed lucky in Boston, a major journalism market. I wanted to work as a reporter, but five months in the hospital and another year convalescing in medically-required isolation didn't make for great credentials, so I took a job at a start-up. After being laid off, I called the general manager of WGBH and said, "I've just been laid off, which gives me more time to pursue WGBH!" Two days later he called me back and gave me a job.

That phone call was a small town way to start, but sometimes Boston feels like a small town.

The feeling of "small town" was amplified after the marathon bombings. I remember during the manhunt, reporting from the media staging area outside of the Target at Arsenal Mall in Arlington. City buses filled with officers rolled in one after another to the police outpost down the street. The buzz among reporters was that the bombers lived on Norfolk Street. I asked a cameraman, "Norfolk Street in Cambridge?" That's where I live.

I headed home. Citizens were on lockdown, but in my neighborhood it was more like a block party. Neighbors who had never met before were standing around, talking. Bom Café and Tupelo offered free food for the displaced. Norfolk Street was barricaded, but I could get close enough to my apartment to use my internet connection to send files to the radio station.

By the next morning, the barricades were pushed aside, the TV cameras had vanished. The manhunt was over. At the house where the Tsarnaevs had lived, the tenant from the apartment below was talking to a straggling journalist. He left the door to the house open, so I walked inside. Up a stairwell coated with debris there was a boarded door. Through a gap I could see rows of adult shoes neatly stacked and on top of them, a pair of pink baby boots. It's jarring to imagine such innocence crawling around in there.

My apartment was a block away. Norfolk Street became my home when I was recovering from cancer and a bone marrow transplant. I moved into what may have been the last affordable apartment in the city, where the old Peruvian landlady decorated the banisters with silk roses when I got married, and even lowered my rent when I was in between jobs.

I never planned on living in Cambridge. After being treated for cancer, I stayed in the area for my health, and built a career. Then, two years ago I left the newsroom grind for a yearlong journalism fellowship at MIT, where I was paid to take classes. I felt like I had won the World Series.

Boston, you have been good to me, and for that I thank you.

I know there are many people who have stories to tell about how Boston has not been good to them, about how they are still struggling for their lives, searching for a job or an affordable rent. I wish you could be as good to them, as you have been to me.

It's time for me to move on from you, Boston, nine years and a few days after I arrived. I came in an ambulance, uninsured and desperate. I'm leaving in a U-Haul, a healthy woman with a career. This time I'm headed on an adventure of my own choosing. I know it wouldn't be possible, but for you.