



LNP 267

Homeless for Two Weeks

We became homeless on April 15, 2013: the day bombs exploded during the Boston Marathon. We won't soon forget the images and stories of people affected – people who lost their limbs or lives.

This is Pat Iyer with *Iyer's Insights*, one of the twice weekly shows of Legal Nurse Podcast.

Be sure to listen to Linda Fostek share her experiences with crisis. Linda knew her crisis was coming as her husband's health deteriorated. My crisis came totally without warning.

My husband and I were coming home from the airport on April 15. We were eating a late lunch in a small restaurant when suddenly the TV displayed images of smoke pouring into the Boston street. Although we could not hear the TV, what we saw was chilling. In a somber and grateful-to-be-alive mood, we took a walk along the beautiful spring pathway along Delaware River before driving the rest of the way home.

What happened?

I was the first one in our house and immediately realized something was drastically wrong. Every surface of the house was coated with an acrid grey dust. The air smelled of machine oil. I left grey footprints on my white floors as I walked around the house. I started wiping down the counters, following my instinct to clean.

When my husband increased the thermostat, grey dust began filling the rooms. I said, "We need to get out – NOW. We shouldn't be breathing this air." We went to a local hotel, still bewildered about what had happened to our house while we were gone.

Over the next days, a team of inspectors, engineers, and insurance adjusters examined the furnace and concluded that a local contractor we had hired put in the wrong size condenser unit, placing it too close to the fire box of the furnace. The

unit melted and spread ashy plastic and soot throughout the house. This was called a puff back.

The insurance company concluded that *everything* we owned needed to be cleaned. They took away shoes, belts, pillows, bed spreads, blankets, afghans, sheets, mittens, scarves, baseball caps, towels, rugs and clothes – literally anything that was portable and could be cleaned. We had only the clothes we wore out of the house the night we moved into the local hotel.

I immediately went shopping for clothes (which was one bright spot in a troubled time.)

Adjustment to hotel living

My husband and I reacted differently to being in a hotel. I was happy to be in a place that was clean, warm and comfortable. My husband got edgy because his routine and environment were disrupted. The first place where we stayed was about 45 minutes from our office. It had a decent restaurant and a quaint colonial atmosphere with four poster beds.

We drove to our office condo each day. Running our businesses provided some comfort.

Meanwhile, at the house, the inspectors were finished, and the crew came in to remove all of our belongings that could be cleaned.

We should have stayed at that hotel. Midway through the second week, we switched to a hotel in the same city as our office. It was taken over by teams of little boys who were participating in soccer tournaments. The breakfast room was filled with these noisy little boys, making it impossible to eat in the same room.

Three days into the second hotel stay, I woke up in the morning with itching bites on the top of my shoulder. All I could think of was bed bugs. I reported them to www.bedbugregistry.com.

The hotel brought in a bed bug sniffing dog, who did not find bed bugs, but the hotel said they believed I was bitten by something. (I wonder if those little boys brought in bugs from the soccer fields.) We cancelled the rest of the reservation and headed back to the colonial style hotel.

Meanwhile the insurance company sent 8 workers to our house to clean it from top to bottom. My husband met them at the house to let them in. Although he planned to stay in the house during the time they were cleaning, he couldn't stand hearing 8 people loudly and simultaneously speaking a language he could not understand.

Cleaning took a week. We moved back home two weeks after the disaster. 6 years later, there is still a lingering odor at times.

What I learned from being homeless

1. There were moments of pleasure in this grim time. I was forced to buy clothes to last through the two weeks, which I enjoyed. My husband got by with fewer clothes.
2. I have a new appreciation for how hard it is for people to have their lives disrupted by illness, disability, divorce, or any of the other factors that cause stress.



3. When I saw all of my clothes come back after cleaning, I realized I have far more clothes than I could possibly use. Every item came back with a tag on it. I remove the tag when I wear the item. I gave away clothes I did not wear after they were cleaned.

4. We were fortunate that the disaster took place in April. We had to replace the furnace with a propane furnace. The end of the heating season allowed us to get the new one installed without the pressure of time.

5. Our insurance company cancelled our policy after the disaster. We became undesirable to insure. Our insurance policy covered the cost of the cleaning and new clothes. I learned that insurance companies like to accept policy money but not pay it out.

6. No matter what inconvenience we went through as a result of being homeless, we emerged safe and whole – and with a cleaner house. The Boston Marathon victims had life-changing experiences that put what we went through into perspective.

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