

"THE BODY OF EVIDENCE"

JON CARROLL, The San Francisco Chronicle, 3-29-85

This is the lightly fictionalized story of Bill K., a songwriter, a poker player and something of a health nut. Bill jogs and bikes; he lifts weights and utilizes his state-of-the-art rowing machine. Bill K. is what you call our physical specimen. A few months ago, Bill was in New York meeting with people important in the pursuit of his craft. He had a luncheon appointment with one such bigwig at an Upper West Side restaurant of indifferent quality. He had been feeling a little peaked all morning, but he had ascribed his condition to the pace of activities in the Large Pippin. He entered the restaurant, shook the appropriate hand, and ordered a pastrami sandwich.

And then he passed out.

Just clunk, head on the table, absolutely gone. His companion, after several anxious minutes, managed to revive him and ship hem back to his temporary residence via taxicab. Bill took to his bed sensibly, and spent the next 48 hours feeling like a piece of raw liver left in the hot sun for many days. Eventually, he felt well enough to travel back to the Bay Area. He decided to check with a prominent neurologist -- unexplained fainting spells were not something to fool around with. He suspected that it was only the flu but he wanted to make sure. The neurologist immediately scotched the flu idea. "That's not the way flu behaves," he said. He ordered up tests. Bill vouchsafed to the hospital various quantities of bodily fluids. Said fluids were analyzed according to approved methods a week later, the results were in: Nothing. "That's great," said Bill. "Not so great," said the neurologist. "It must be something more serious." He ordered Bill to stop drinking and exercising and driving his automobile. "Just in case," he said. Bill went for a CAT-scan. Nothing. Bill wore a heart monitoring device for 24 hours. Nothing. Bill had less accessible fluids removed from his body. Nothing. A curious thing happened: With every negative report, the demeanor of the neurologist became ever more grave. Every time Bill was provided with yet another clean bill of health, the doctor would shake his head and mutter, "Looks bad." Bill spent many sleepless nights worrying over his condition, and many fruitless days staring out the window and dreaming of a good run, on a nice drive or a stiff drink. He began to form the notion that over-testing was as big a medical problem as over-prescribing. Eventually, the doctor ran out of tests. Bill was permitted to jog again. He began to forget about his supposed malady. He did his five miles a day, drove to the movie theatre, enjoyed a rum drink in the evenings. Then Bill's wife cut her hand badly while chopping vegetables. Bill drove her to the emergency room. While she was getting bandaged up, Bill told the attending doctor his sad tale.

"You had the flu," said the doctor.

"But," said Bill, "the neurologist said that the flu doesn't behave like that." "What does he know?" asked the doctor. "How many cases of flu do you think he sees in a year?" Here we see 'em all the time. This winter's flu had a lot of fainting associated with it. We'd see it practically every day."

There's a moral here somewhere.



OPINIONS AND FEELINGS ARE FREQUENTLY A PERSONAL TRIUMPH OVER GOOD THINKING
YOU DEFINE REALITY BY WHAT YOU KNOW, WHAT YOU BELIEVE, AND WHAT YOU DO ABOUT IT.