

TRIAGE 2307

Characters

Sue: a volunteer.

Bill: a wheel chair user.

Frank: Bill's friend.

Tony: A visually impaired patient waiting for transport.

Peter: A patient who sits behind Tony.

Driver: A driver who directs Tony out of the waiting room

None speaking part.

Sue a volunteer is wheeling Bill, a patient into the waiting room at a London hospital. With him is his friend, Frank.

Sue places the wheelchair user two feet in front of Tony, a visually impaired man with a white cane in his right hand. Tony is wearing shades. He is dressed all in black, A black woolly head covering, a black Covid mask, a black jacket, trousers, socks and shoes.

Frank sits sideways in the seat in front of Tony in order to face Bill.

SUE: Here you are, as soon as we get the go ahead I will take you to the Out Patients.

BILL: I'm a patient here. Why should I have to go to the end of a queue at the outpatients?

SUE: Everyone has to go through the triage process.

BILL: But I'm one hundred and one you know.

SUE: One hundred and one, well done.
My mother was one hundred and one when she died.
I'm as old as the NHS. That's 75 if you don't know how old the NHS is.

BILL: Of course I know how old the NHS is and look at the state it's in. And look at the state I'm in and I'm a quarter of a century older. It's just my legs that don't work properly anymore. I'm not expiring like the NHS is, at the moment, anyway.

Tony turns to the volunteer.

TONY: So you're a volunteer.?

SUE: Yes, I am.

TONY: Why do hospitals have to use the French word, Triage? I mean, we have the English term, to prioritise to express the same thing, don't we?

SUE: I suppose so. It took me a long time to work out what it really meant.

TONY: My mouth gets me into trouble sometimes. When I was exiting Charing Cross Hospital a volunteer came up to me and asked me if I needed some help. I said, "You can help me across the road to the bus stop if you like".

I took hold of his elbow and we walked out of the hospital.

I like engaging in social intercourse which I couldn't do during the Covid Pandemic, so I asked him where he came from.

"I'm from Ulster for all my sins.", he said.

"That's very interesting," I responded, "Tell me all about them."

He went real quiet and I thought he was trying to decide which one to start with. He didn't speak to me again. He stayed silent all the way to the bus stop.

SUE: I just tell people my Christian name, that's enough.

Frank: But you just told us your age.

SUE: So I did! Well, sometimes I let slip things I shouldn't.

Sue leaves to do something else.

TONY: Congratulations on being one hundred and one.

BILL: Thank you.

TONY: Which area do you live?

FRANK: We live at the Chelsea Hospital.

BILL: I was in North Africa and then in southern Europe during the war.

FRANK: And I was serving in Canada at the same time.

BILL: I don't know how I survived it.

TONY: Thank you for all you did for our country.

BILL: I don't know what to say!

TONY: You don't have to say anything.

*Sue re-appears again.
Tony turns to Sue.*

TONY: Can you take me to the toilet please and wait outside whilst I take a pee?

SUE: Give me your beaker of water. You can't put it into the rubbish bin.

TONY: Can it be put somewhere I'd like to drink more water on my return?

SUE: Of course, give me your beaker.

*Sue puts the plastic beaker on the desk of an administrator
and leads Tony to the toilet.*

FRANK: You look upset. Has that blind bloke upset you?

BILL: He thanked me for what I did for the country in the war. I was touched. I can't remember if anyone thanked me when we were de-mobbed. It's just nice to hear that some people are still grateful for what we did.

FRANK: You've got tears in your eyes.

BILL: He's blind and he thought of me.

FRANK: He must be in his sixties at least. Sounds like he just missed conscription.

BILL: I think he understood some of what I went through.

FRANK: I don't think anyone can feel what you felt without going through the same traumatic experiences.

BILL: Well, He gave his appreciation to our contribution to the war effort. And we had to put the horrors to the back of our minds. There was little understanding of PTSD in those days. It's just nice to feel appreciated for what we did so long ago.

*Sue and Tony enter the waiting room.
Sue hands Tony his plastic beaker of water.
Tony returns to his seat with the help of Sue.*

TONY: I was ready at 8.15am. this morning, two hours before my appointment.
The transport didn't arrive until 10:10, five minutes before my appointment. There were road works. And the driver had me down as someone else and it was another hospital.

Good job he asked me for my name, otherwise the Ai would have directed him to somewhere else and I would have arrived even later.

I asked the driver to get in touch with his Controller, which he did. I called out to him, "Tell him to contact the hospital. Tell him my appointment is in five minutes, and tell him I'm concerned that the hospital might think it was my fault that I'm late."

SUE: That's life!

TONY: Can you find out how long I have to wait for transport?

SUE: Which floor were you on when they telephoned for transport?

TONY: I don't know, I was the only one in the lift, except for the porter, that is.

SUE: So you don't know?

TONY: No, but I have my appointment correspondence with me.

Tony pulls his hospital letter out of his pocket and hands it to the volunteer. The volunteer reads it.

SUE: Your appointment was on the second floor. I'll go up and find out.

The volunteer walks out of the door.

FRANK: You went to a Second World War cemetery in Europe, five years ago, didn't you?

BILL: Yes, I did in recognition of the ultimate sacrifices other servicemen made.

FRANK: Which one was it?

BILL: Cassino, in Italy.

FRANK: How was it?

BILL: There are 4,271 servicemen buried there.

BILL: You remembered the number.

BILL: They all deserve to be remembered.

FRANK: I don't know if I could have gone.

Tony turns to Bill.

TONY: Do you use a computer?

BILL: No, I don't!

TONY: Every time I press a key on the computer it tells me what I've pressed. If I press a down arrow it reads the line. And if I press two other keys it reads the whole document.

The volunteer returns and speaks to Tony.

SUE: There's a 90 minute wait from the time the transport was ordered. Sometimes it's less, sometimes it's more, depending on the state of the traffic.

TONY: When did that happen?

SUE: I don't know. I'll go and find out.

Sue leaves the room to go to reception.

FRANK: What was it like in North Africa?

BILL: Hot and when there was a sand storm the sand got everywhere. There was a lot of waiting around until we were on the move again.

Sue returns to the waiting room and turns to Tony.

SUE: You have around 20 minutes to wait.

TONY: Thank you.

Sue turns to Bill.

SUE: We can go to the Out Patients, now.

Sue takes hold of the handles to the wheelchair and turns Bill around so they are facing the door and start walking. Frank follows them.

Peter enters the waiting room and sits behind Tony.

Tony turns around as Peter sits down.

TONY: Are you waiting for transport?

PETER: No. I'm waiting for a prescription.

TONY: What are your interests outside of family and work?

PETER: I like exercising.

TONY: Oh! You're on the hearty side of the social divide.
I'm on the arty side.

PETER: I'm Peter. I like drawing, too.

Tony fumbles in his pocket for a card and hands it to Peter.

TONY: Here, take one of my cards, my web address is on the back. I do some writing, poetry, prose and playlets. Small plays, after all, who wants to read a full-length play on the Internet. So, I keep them short. Or perhaps it's because I can't write a full-length play.

PETER: I'll take a look sometime.
Pity I don't have a card for my Instagram site.

TONY: I hate the word, Triage.

PETER: Do you know where it comes from?

TONY: It's French isn't it?

PETER: Before that.

TONY: No, I don't. Tell me.

Peter takes out his mobile, switches it on and Googles.

PETER: Listen carefully! The term was first used in the Napoleonic wars but there were 5 tiers of priority, not three. It wasn't until 1862 that an Egyptian papyrus was discovered, which dates from 1,600 BCE, which in turn is from another that is from around 3,000 BCE.

Source: Encyclopedia Britannica.

Categories from the medics point of view:

1. A medical condition I can heal.
2. A medical condition I intend to fight with.
3. A medical condition that cannot be healed.

Here's another interpretation of the papyrus:

1. Patients in category 1. get medical precedence.
2. Those the medics thought might survive but weren't sure were second in line for medical help, time permitting.
3. Those who were thought to have no chance of survival get no medical attention at all.

So now you know.

TONY: That's interesting.

PETER: Incidentally, triage comes from the old French word, trier, which means to sort. That was back in Napoleonic times.

TONY: The next time anyone uses the word triage to me, I'll tell them that. Thank you.

Sue returns with a man.

SUE: Tony, your transport is here. This is your driver.

Tony stands up and turns towards Sue. He holds out his hand with the water beaker in it. Sue takes the water beaker.

TONY: Take my arm will you, please.

The driver takes Tony's arm and escorts him to the door.

TONY: You're doing it right. Some London Transport staff have started to put their arm around mine, as if I'm married to them. I don't like that. You can direct me by putting a little more pressure with your thumb or fingers around my elbow.

The driver directs Tony out of the waiting room.

THE END

