

# Q U E R Y

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I lost my coffee cup a week ago. A big, 750 mL Thermos with a switch-top lid that I'd carted around to four provinces and dozens of hospitals. I'd fill it up in the morning, and it rarely ran dry for the rest of the day; I'd keep refilling it from the coffee machine in the doctor's lounge or my office.

Coffee Cup came to me as a gift near the end of my residency. I had just passed my College exam, and my preceptors bought what they figured was the most meaningful and practical memorial — a gigantic coffee cup. Before Coffee Cup, I'd bought huge volumes of Tim Hortons brew. Now I make my own or mooch from others, saving a couple thousand dollars a year.

I had Coffee Cup for a good four years. It's embarrassing to admit it, but I used to talk to him. Him, meaning I gave him a gender. I talked to him about difficult patients, arguments with my wife, how I was looking forward to a week's vacation. I chatted with him about inane things that would have bored anyone else. He was my companion on call nights, my buddy on the drive to work. I drank from him so many times that the coffee developed its own unique, lacquered taste from a million fill-ups. Coffee from any other source just didn't taste the same. Not worse, mind. Just different.

And then I lost Coffee Cup. I feel like a close relative has died, or as if I've betrayed a lover. I left him behind somewhere, probably during rounds in the hospital. It's painful to reminisce. I was always misplacing Coffee Cup, it's true; we take most for granted those we love. Medical staff would tease me about perpetually leaving him behind. I'd often be at

the point of leaving the hospital for my office when I'd notice that my hand wasn't holding him when I wanted a sip. So I'd retrace my steps, back to wherever I'd set him down. People used to pick up Coffee Cup, thinking they were doing me a favour, until I told them it was better for them just to leave Coffee Cup alone. I'd find him, I told them; if he got moved, then I wouldn't be able to locate him on my search.

I've thoroughly checked the hospital. I've posted notices on bulletin boards: HAVE YOU FOUND COFFEE CUP written in black magic marker over a — yes — a mug shot. I've made announcements through the switchboard PA in case anybody found him, thinking that they'd see me afterwards and return him to me. But no luck. No Cup.

I've punished myself by not buying a replacement. You see, it would be easy to replace Coffee Cup physically, but not emotionally. I deserve to suffer for losing him. And so I buy enough Tim Hortons coffee to have purchased ten replacements by now. Like I say, it just doesn't taste the same.

Farewell, Coffee Cup.

(If any of you out there find a Coffee Cup candidate, here are the particulars: he had sticky stuff on the bottom, a hairline crack in the lid, and the T of Thermos was worn off. Silver with black handle and top. A polar bear sticker on the back. Please send it care of Ursus to the *CMAJ* editorial offices.)

— Dr. Ursus