

Empathy development in narrative medicine

Original Poetry and reflection by Tanisha Jowsey 2016

If wishes were horses

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A lecturer in medical education
Eighteen months in
Long days, hard work, challenging fun
Learning, striving, endlessly
From a waterfall of fast-flowing knowledge
Filled with foreign acronyms.
Facilitating the learning of others,
I grin with satisfaction

Side-stepping politics then crashing into politics
A battle scar on my shin, I step cautiously forward
Into the simulation training feedback session
One student blames another "she didn't do what I told her to"
The air heats up between them
I interject, refocus the learning around teamwork
and collaborative communication
mindful of the deep water

Nine Maori and two Pakeha patients smoke
Outside my office door
Leaning on their life supports
And exhaling toxins into the air
I hold my breath and count the steps
Second hand smoke from a hospital
The irony thick
I wish for them better worlds

Writing an article with three thousand academics
Our ideas clashing and grumbling
(some voices silent)
Time is a distant luxury
And the deadline looms while I scramble
For words, acronyms, education literature, something with sizzle
Wishing I had more time
Wondering if anyone will read it

Meanwhile my baby grows at home
Now walking now talking now climbing ladders

The light fades while I sit in traffic
The sweetest sound chimes while I turn the key
"Mummy's home, Mummy's home"
I crouch into his hug grateful and warm
My husband an exhausted shell on the couch
Toys and sand everywhere, I grin with delight

Reflection on writing process

While I was writing the poem above I wondered if anyone would ever read it. I wondered if my colleagues and supervisor would read it and what they would think. Was I presenting an accurate picture? Was it depressing? Had I demonstrated that despite the hardships I actually like my job a lot? I wondered whether I'm a good teacher, whether my job is all that I am, whether anything I do in my job makes an actual difference to people's health and wellbeing. It seems meaningless. And yet, it was helpful for my own growth to think deeply about what my job is and where I find the difficulties and the pleasures within it. And to remember that I am not only my job.

I thought about rhythm and the size of each stanza, aiming for consistency. I decided not to try to find rhyme because it might distract me from the authentic meanings I was trying to create. Instead I focused on clear metaphors. . The process of writing this poem and editing it several times over has brought new focus to my mind.