

A Very Embarrassing Moment

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Article abstract

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A Very Embarrassing Moment

TRAVAIL CRÉATIF / CREATIVE WORK

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Résumé

Je suis atteint de nanisme et je blogue principalement sur les questions liées au handicap. Ce récit porte sur le moment où un médecin m'a exposé à une salle pleine de stagiaires.

Mots clés

nanisme, réductionnisme médical, marchandisation

Summary

I have dwarfism and blog mainly about disability related issues. This story is about the time a doctor exposed me to a room full of interns.

Keywords

dwarfism, medical reductionism, commodification

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Conflit d'intérêts

M. Verpaelst est un ami de Maude Laliberté, éditrice de section; Mme Laliberté n'a pas été impliqué dans l'évaluation de ce manuscrit.

Conflicts of Interest

M. Verpaelst is a friend of Maude Laliberté, section editor; Mme Laliberté was not involved in the evaluation of this manuscript.

Preamble

I have dwarfism, and have been blogging (www.patreon.com/gutsydwarf), mainly about disability related issues and have been a guest several times now on various CBC radio shows. The story is from my old blog ([A Very Embarrassing Moment](#), published November 6, 2011 on dulcimerdude.com), about the time a doctor exposed me to a room full of interns.

A Very Embarrassing Moment

Have you ever been embarrassed? Not some mild “Whoops, you have a bit of food stuck on the corner of your mouth” sort of moment, but rather, a truly emotionally charged event? I was about seven years old when just such an embarrassing moment happened to me.

I was in the hospital at the time and the centre of attention on most days. Each morning, my orthopaedic doctor would show me off to yet another gaggle of his interns. He would then detail all of the primary features that my particular type of dwarfism came with. Believe it or not, this was not the embarrassing moment I'm referring to, as I was getting used to these daily “show and tell” sessions. No, my embarrassing moment was much worse, and I never saw it coming.

One day, an orderly arrived with a gurney, stating that he was taking me to an “examination”. Being bored to tears by the monotony of the daily hospital routine, I was actually happy for the change of scenery, and almost jumped at the chance to get out of my room. After a short journey through a part of the hospital I'd never been to before, the orderly wheeled me into my “examination” room. It was very plain, with three solid walls, and one large curtain for the fourth wall.

The orderly left and time passed, the way it usually does in a hospital: Slowly and boringly. My doctor finally entered the room, and asked me to take off my hospital gown. Only wearing my underwear now, the curtain opened and I realized I was on a small stage, standing nearly naked in front of a class full of medical students.

The good doctor, blithely ignorant of the emotional impact his actions would have on me, droned on to the class, pointing out my scoliosis, my pigeon toes, my short stubby hands, and on, and on. Not once did anyone speak to me directly, or ask me anything personal. It was just a mechanical and mechanistic overview of all things dwarfish. Throughout the whole session, I was simply referred to as “the patient”.

Nobody at the hospital ever explained beforehand that I would be used in this massive show and tell session. No one ever asked me for permission. And, no one certainly ever thought of the emotional impact this would have on a seven year old boy who was already dealing with enough problems of his own.

At that moment, I felt like I was nothing, not a person at all but a thing. I was too young to fully understand what else I felt. But the after effects dragged on for many years.

Feeling ashamed of my body was one side effect that lasted longer than I would have liked. I remember hiding my hands in my coat pockets whenever possible, right up until college. Debilitating stage fright was another effect. By my mid-thirties, I had worked out all feelings of shame towards my body. My stage fright demons were also thoroughly beaten back. I came to realize that my doctor had been so very wrong to have used me as a teaching mannequin.

The other thing I realized was that the performer in me was born on that embarrassing day. In a room with three walls and one curtain in front of me, I came to feel most comfortable on stage, a place that has no walls, and the curtain is now behind me. Now, each time I step up on that stage, I get to choose what I present: The music that is inside me, and not the physical form it emanates from.