

# Medical Home

Category: Poems

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*A model or philosophy of primary care that is patient-centered, comprehensive, team-based, coordinated, accessible and focused on quality and safety. –Patient-Centered Primary Care Collaborative*

It's a philosophy  
not a place.  
I get it.  
Certainly we never used that term  
to describe what we offered  
there in the broken heart of the city

but we had a townhouse  
with a fireplace and a living room  
where patients waited and shared their laments.  
We played music during office hours—  
gospel and Latin mostly—and sometimes  
invited the homeless or distressed to rest  
in the upstairs room we called the chapel.

My godson K spent his infancy  
in a basket under the front desk  
where his mother, once our patient, presided.  
She handled the chaos each day seemed to bring  
and drew out each patient's story in full  
despite the havoc it wreaked with the schedule.

She assigned each clinician the patients  
she deemed us best suited to treat  
and, after each consult, verified  
that every symptom, question and fear  
had been expressed and addressed. If not,  
she sent them back to be heard.

This sort of thing cannot last forever.  
The braiding together of disparate lives  
over all those years took its toll.  
Our demons sometimes bested us.  
New rules came down for premises,  
labs and insurance. We struggled  
to pay the bills.

But ask K, now a man, about the best  
most stable years of his life  
and he'll say these were the ones.  
Ask me about the best job I ever had  
and I'll say this was the one.  
Our old patients have mostly died  
or been forced out of the neighborhood.  
The clinic, too, was doomed by gentrification.

I don't know if this is a poem  
or just a memory  
that has slipped into words  
but I remember some lines from Frost  
that describe what we had:  
*a place where, when you have to go there,  
they have to take you in.*  
Home.