

Perfect Circle

Category: Poems

written by Francesca Decker | October 30, 2015

Francesca Decker

“You drew a perfect circle!” she exclaims.
I nod and smile as I explain,
“Yes, well, thank you...
And now this circle is a plate.
Half is vegetables.
A quarter is starch or sugar.
A quarter is protein—meat, dairy, eggs, or beans.”
Now she nods and smiles.
We discuss her diabetes,
asking her son to help her do weekly foot exams.
She has lost weight.
I give heartfelt congratulations.
Before she leaves, my attending tells her
about a local food truck
selling fresh fruit and vegetables.
As she climbs down from the exam table,
she grins again and declares,
“Boy, I’m just impressed with you!”

I feel pride well up.
I have reached her.
I’ve made a difference!
She goes on:
“A perfect circle,
I just can’t believe it!”

About the poet:

Francesca Decker, a family physician, is currently taking time off from practice to help take care of her mother, in Ithaca, NY. Francesca is launching a new website, ahumandoctor.com, that explores the many aspects of trying to be a complete human being while also practicing medicine. “I was a fourth-year chief resident in the University of Rochester department of family medicine at the time of this writing. For years, I have been passionate about public health, behavior change and nutrition. In addition, over the past two years I’ve come to better appreciate how powerful narrative medicine can be. For me, it provides insight, illuminates shared experience and helps prevent burnout by finding the meaning and humor in my day-to-day work.”

About the poem:

“This poem is based on a patient visit. I couldn’t help but laugh at myself

when she commented on how impressed she was by the circle I'd drawn. It was a humbling reminder of the small moments that light up a day for us and for our patients. Sometimes (many times!) the best moments have less to do with biomedical care and more to do with our presence and with the interaction itself."

Poetry editors:

Johanna Shapiro and Judy Schaefer