

Bike Rides and Nothingness

Category: Cancer

written by J.M. Monica van de Ridder | June 5, 2021

Every second Wednesday of the month we met on Zoom, five of my medical colleagues and I, for more than a year. We started off sharing fun facts. She spoke of her bike rides—how fast she could go, how beautiful the fall leaves were, how fresh the forest air smelled, how spring brought a veil of green.

We also discussed the differences between a doctor's approach and a scientist's approach to teaching students and residents in a hospital setting. We provoked each other. We enjoyed the intellectual challenge that faced us—the puzzle of creating a sound medical education research design.

Till that second Wednesday in March. She entered the call early and mentioned that she did not have good news for our group. She had to quit. She was going into hospice care. In her own home. She was only able to join our call for a few minutes.

I tried to reflect carefully on her news by saying, "I think I know what you mean—you have to prioritize your activities..."

She answered, "There is nothing to prioritize. I just can't do it."

My inadequacy to find and use the right words pained me. I feared that I had hurt her.

That call was her last one with us. Our last one with her. Although she had mentioned neuropathy, and we had seen her sometimes wearing a little hat, her departure was unexpected.

There was no proper good-bye. What do you say in a situation like that? What do you say when fingers cannot touch each other across the screens? What do you say when your voice breaks and tears flow, but you know she does not want you to be upset?

Our group took a break for a couple of months.

Today I wrote an email about meeting again, on the second Wednesday of June. This time, I entered only four addresses.

I thought about bike rides and nothingness.

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