

I LOVE THE FEELING AFTER A RUN

BY CAROLINE HORTON

This is a series of voice notes recorded whilst out on a walk.

(gentle music)

(New voice note)

So today, it's December 5th, 2021,
and it's about 8:00 am,
and I can see my breath actually,
I think, that's the first time this year.

So, back when we were given an hour to exercise,
I'd worked out this 10K loop that I used to run on a regular basis.
And it's this loop actually, but because I'm recording,
I'm going to walk it while I talk to you, if that makes sense.

Hear her walk for a time. Her breath is rhythmic. She's striding not wandering.

Yeah, in March, 2020, I was drafted into ICU, which is intensive care.
I'm not an ICU nurse, I'm A&E,
but you know, I had some of the skills that they needed and lots of us had volunteered.
And I'm going to say this now, just so that I've said it,
because I feel like a bit of a fraud.
I don't work clinically anymore,
so I still work for the NHS,
but yeah, I stopped following a breakdown.
I had a breakdown,
which felt like quite a public one in September, 2020.

(woman panting)

I love this view up here.
You can see the trees and the church spire in the distance,
and the view changes all the time.
I stood here last autumn,
and the leaves were just these incredible colours,
these reds and oranges.
And it was only just like,
and I'd been – I'd been signed off for six weeks already,
and I decided or I realised that I wasn't going back.

(New voice note)

I guess it was around the time that mom was dying.
I was still quite young at that point.
I was just finishing up school, and we had a lot of nurses come to the house around
that time.
And there was this one nurse called Joe, who I really remember
because she used to sometimes just sit with us at the end of her shift.

And there was this one time when she stayed,
and we just watched this episode of "Dad's Army" together,
and I think we just all felt really safe, when Joe was around.
And I remember thinking, Oh, okay, yeah,
I think – I think that's something I could do.
So yeah, that's kind of how it happened.

(car engine roaring)

We follow the lane for a bit now,
this was my route to the hospital this bit.
My commute was about 40 minutes,
but there'd be so many times when I would just get in the car at the end of a shift, and
then it would be like I went blank or something
because I would get home and I had no memory of how I got there.

(Leaves crunching underfoot / birds tweeting)

(New voice note)

Back then, there were things that I didn't want to tell people in case,
well, in case it made them more scared,
and then, they got sick or a loved one got sick,
and yeah, I didn't want to make it worse,
but I feel different about it now.
So, I'm recording some of what I saw or well,
some of what I remember anyway,
because, well I feel like people just don't know,
and I really want my family to know.

One day, I came face to face with a stag right around here.
I don't know who was more surprised, me or him.
I wasn't good at that point, but he was so beautiful.
It all just sort of went away for a second.

I remember standing in the room where we took off our PPE
and there was this old man there
who was being shown what to do,
and he had just sat with his wife while she died.

He hadn't seen her for weeks
up until that point while she'd been in the hospital.
And I remember seeing his hands really shaking
as he was trying to take off the plastic shoe covers.

(New voice note)

Okay, so, well, day one,

I got two hours shadowing an ICU nurse, before my first proper shift.
So I mean, it was really like just sort of diving in at the deep end.
And ICU is a very noisy place,
much noisier than I ever could have imagined.
There's lots of machines everywhere.
There's the beeping of the ventilators,
there's these lights flashing, it's all very intense.
And then on top of that, you know, because you're wearing
this full body kit of PPE, you become very aware of the
sound of your own breathing.
And it's almost like you can hear your own heartbeat,
like echoing throughout the suit.
At one point, I remember there was one actual ICU nurse with us across 22 beds.
But it was probably towards the end of my first week,
I was standing outside for a bit and it was just getting dark
and I was just looking across at the ambulance bay,
and I had never ever seen the amount of ambulances.
And on top of that, they just kept on coming,
and I was trying to count them and it was like I had to just start over again and again
and again, because my brain just couldn't process,
the numbers of ambulances.
It was, yeah.

And then at one point, the morgue was full,
so they'd had to bring in these trucks,
these refrigeration trucks that they were parked outside in the carpark.
And it's not like I ever saw anything being stacked in them,
but you know, I could see the porters,
sort of going to and fro, and you knew what was happening,
and I just really remember thinking,
Oh my goodness, like in normal times,
I'd maybe go wrapping a body once a week maybe.
And there was this one day, quite early on when I did 17.
Sorry, I'm just – I'm just going to pause a second.

Pause

It's very cold. It's very cold out today.
The sky is this really bright blue though.
I really like winter on days like this.

Yeah, so that day when the consultant had to go,
I mean, I was already on the edge, right?
Definitely.
So, it wasn't a big thing, not really,
but it was in front of colleagues,
and I was just trying to label these vials of blood.
The consultant just sort of rolled her eyes at me,
and then snatched the patient's notes

and she made a sort of comment that I couldn't really hear,
and suddenly, I just, I could feel – feel my breathing getting very high,
and my chest, and you know, with the mask too.
And my hands were shaking,
and I started crying, really crying.
I couldn't see anything.
I think, everything had steamed up.
And then, I felt this hand on the smaller of my back
through the PPE, and this hand just guided me away

to have my breakdown in private.
And then this colleague who I didn't really know, he just held me.

(birds tweeting)

(New voice note)

One of the things I found hardest was talking to the families.
So, patients were generally sedated and on ventilators.
So, when the husband or the daughter or whoever called the ward,
you know, the phone would be passed to you.
And then, I'd just sort of hold the phone up to their loved one's ear
so they could talk or sing or pray or cry.
But then after that, you would have to answer their questions.
And often, we just didn't have the answers, you know?
And there was stuff like hearing little kids, singing down the phone to their moms
or you know, I don't know if that's
'cause I've got young kids at home myself.
But yeah, I just found,

I was,

I was, well, we all were, you know, just so out of our depth.

Starts up. Hear her running.

I'm going to run the last bit.
I just love the feeling after I run.
It's like I've re-entered my body,
you know, like I've moved through something,
and it's just my feet and my breath,
and my feet and my breath,
and my feet and my breath.

Cut.