

Two Lives

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"We have two lives, and the second begins when we realize that we only have one." –Confucius

After nearly two decades of being nestled in the comfort of our busy community practice in the Midwest, my husband and I decided to take a leap of faith. A casual remark at a chance meeting with a semi-retired colleague led us to the Federal Jobs website. Before we knew it, we had positions at a Veterans Affairs facility and were moving across the country to a South Florida metro surreptitiously like the erstwhile Bombay of our childhood.

We downsized in a big way.

Moving into our tiny, empty-nester's apartment led us to renunciate most of our belongings and break our warehouse club shopping habits. Living in the city after many years of bucolic bliss brought changes and challenges. Driving here is akin to being on a monster truck obstacle course. The native language seems to be Spanish. My husband and I are perpetual students of the adult learning Spanish classes offered by our local library.

Surprisingly, I don't miss my old corner office or the shiny new cancer center as much as I miss my uber-compliant, loving and trusting, former patients and staff.

Here, I'm simply HemOnc Provider #4.

We have a sparse, modest, chemotherapy infusion room. My office/exam room has mismatched chairs with oversized windows and a wonderful, panoramic view. I can see the sky. Lots of blue sky, punctuated by beautiful clouds, and rainbows.

I am treating a completely dissimilar demographic; a diverse, somewhat underserved population, with unique stories. Homelessness and food insecurity is real. Mental illness is the rule not the exception.

Cancers seem to be more advanced. Beneath their gruff, battle-worn, stoic exteriors are kind-hearted men and women of valor, integrity, and resilience. It is an immensely satisfying privilege to serve those that have served our country.

My minimalist life is deeply purposeful and peaceful. I'm grateful for simple pleasures like savoring sweet, juicy mangos, belonging to two book clubs, watching the sun rise over the ocean, or walking on the board walk with my eclectic walking group. My evenings and weekends are not held hostage by a bottomless in-box and charts. I rarely multi-task. Much as I loved my work, it seemed like the right time and the right place for this sea change.

I can just be.

"They must often change who would be constant in happiness or wisdom. We have two lives, and the second begins when we realize we only have one." Confucius, 5th century BC.

Everything happened so fast that it is only now that I am reflecting on why we moved. It was multifactorial as we like to say in our consults; a combination of wanting a smaller footprint, and to relinquish materialism, warmer weather, a better work-life balance, and most significantly... providence.

Like most of us in medicine, I've evolved. I've tried to adapt to and gracefully accept change while stubbornly holding on to the essence of my old-fashioned practice style of providing tender loving care.

At the end of the day, what truly matters is here and now. It's about living each moment with love, gratitude and laughter, and giving and sharing. My past life was hectic, yet beautiful. The calmness of the present offers me time to appreciate the stillness within and connect with the universe. I hope the future will bring new experiences and adventures.

It is twilight and I am finally home.

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