

# Laurie Wise

## On Being Human

**B**reech *n.* 1. the buttocks.

I was a breech birth, which means I'm not an ass, I just look like one. Awkward and idiotic scenarios are stepping stones across the muddy waters of my life. I have often searched for reasons as to why I am able to look ridiculous with such ease, and excuse myself by declaring to be a victim of sensory overload and exhaustion. I have spent the last twenty years as a nurse, working twelve hour shifts, raising three children and one husband, going to school, and meeting the needs of the universe and all those who reside therein.

**fatigue** *n.* 1. weariness from exertion.  
2. *Mech.* the temporary lessening of

function of organs, tissues or cells after excessive exertion or stimulation.

The 3 – 11PM shift was a difficult one for me to work, because as a wife and mother, I had already put in a full day before I reported to work. By the time I took report from the nurse going off duty, reviewed my charts and meds, set up my IV's and made rounds with the doctors, I was into sensory overload. Then my work began. It was on one of these 3-11 shifts, that I made one of the most embarrassing blunders of my career as a nurse. On a typical day I am assigned to six or seven patients I have never taken care of before. It is difficult to learn everything about all of my patients in a fifteen minute report, so I focus on the critical elements of vital

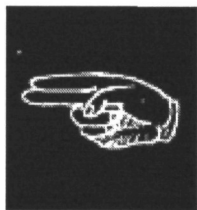
signs, diagnosis, and when did she or he poop last. I entered the room of the first of my seven patients, and found her up in a chair fully dressed in slacks, shirt and socks, and surrounded by 10 to 15 family members. They appeared fairly settled in, but I needed to do a quick head to toe assessment, so I continued with the family in the room. It would be a quick listen to heart, lungs and pulse check, and the usual "having any pain?" assessment. Visitors who are chatting away, always seem to be stricken mute when a nurse enters the room. This time was no exception. They could have continued their conversation while I listened and prodded, but instead chose to burn holes in me with their eyes. I bent down to check Mrs. Smith's pulse in her left foot and was unable to find it. The genius diagnostician in me was alerted, and I was considering deep vein thrombosis (blood clot) verses arterial insufficiency, when I became aware of hissing remarks coming from much of the kinfolk. "What exactly are you doing nurse?" asked the daughter icily. I didn't like her smart ass tone of voice, so I put on my, "I'll blow you out of the water with my medical jargon attitude," and proceeded to explain the importance of pulsations in the dorsalis pedal pulse. She stopped me in mid sentence with, "my mother has a wooden leg, I doubt that it has a pulse, dorsalis pedal or otherwise." Shit. Busted! OK Laurie, you can do it, quick wit recovery --NOW! Nothing. My brain was fried from fatigue. The only thing I could come up with was, Hey, ya never know, Pinnocchio came to life! Better not, I thought, judging from the look on the kinfolks' faces they would

not find this amusing. I simply apologized, finished my exam and slithered out of the room.

**distract** *v.t.* **x.** to divert, as the mind or attention.

Occasionally I worked the general medical floor, which was nice because I was able to care for patients for a longer period of time and establish a rapport with them. Mrs. Pitzer was a 56 year old patient who had suffered a severe stroke that left her paralyzed and unable to speak. She had the most beautiful, luminous brown eyes, and I communicated with her through them. Occasionally she would make sounds that I came to understand as affirmative or negative. I was fiercely protective of her and was very aware of the responsibility of her care. One day I placed Mrs. Pitzer in her wheelchair to take her to X-ray for a brain scan. Tucking her flaccid arms gently into the wheelchair, I explained where we were going and why. She looked at me with those beautiful expressive eyes and I sensed she understood, but I also saw a look of apprehension, perhaps at having to leave her room where she felt safe, to go out into the hospital and be seen by the public. "Don't worry," I assured her patting her shoulder, "I'll be with you all the way." I wheeled her down the hall to the elevator and pressed the down button. Luckily, no one was around so I hoped that alleviated Mrs. Pitzer's self consciousness. "*Ding*," the elevator doors opened, and I pushed Mrs. Pitzer in, banging my leg on the door which

knocked my pen out of my pocket. The pen hit the floor with a *tink* and rolled out into the hall. I stepped out into the hall, bent over and picked up my pen and heard a *swoosh, click*. The silence was terrifying. *Vroom!* I straightened up, snapped my pen in half, and silently screamed “OH MY GOD, NO! OH SHIT! DAMN! I fell upon the up button, tapping out a frantic Morse code, “G-O-D-P-L-E-A-S-E-M-A-K-E-I-T-C-O-M-E-B-A-C-K-O-R-K-I-L-L-M-E-N-O-W.” I thought of poor Mrs. Pitzer riding up and down on the elevator as helpless as a potted plant. Fear welled up in me: “What if Doctor Hunt is on his way in to make rounds and finds his patient, alone and frightened, riding around on the elevator?” My career was over. By tomorrow I would be wearing one of those stupid Burger King hats, telling everyone to have it their way. I leaned my forehead against the elevator door which was as cold as the blood coursing through my veins. Gradually I became aware of vibrations. “Oh God, I think it’s coming. *Ding. Click. Woosh*. There was Mrs. Pitzer sitting in her wheelchair, mute and motionless, the elevator sentinel. “Thank you God!” I was relieved no one else was around, and falling to my knees, I begged her forgiveness for what I had done, rambling on about how I’m usually more responsible than this, but distracted by my damn pen I had let her down. I gazed up at her face searching for forgiveness, and found those beautiful brown eyes dancing with mirth.



**wear y** adj. **1.** physically or mentally exhausted, as by hard work.

Often, twelve hour shifts would turn into fourteen hour shifts once new admissions were settled in and all my charting was done. I would unwind after one of these marathon days by going to the fitness center and floating languidly in the pool. On this particular night, I had just finished working 7AM to 9PM and my mind was numb. I arrived at the fitness center and could not even remember how I got there. I wearily changed into my bathing suit, put on my swim slippers, removed my glasses, rendering me almost blind, and put on my goggles to protect my eyes from the ravages of chlorine. I dragged myself from the locker room out to the pool area, which was dimly lit, giving it an even more peaceful air. Not a soul was around, one good thing about showing up so late. I rounded the corner and there was the pool, water crystal clear as glass and not a ripple. It was so inviting, I just wanted to run and dive in, so I put down my towel and started to run toward the deep end. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the sign, “Absolutely No Diving.” Being the geek I am, I stopped right before becoming airborne, not wanting to risk being thrown out for rule breaking. I trudged over to the steps that led into the shallow end, grasping the rail as I descended. I left the last step and realized—I was standing on the bottom of the pool—there wasn’t any water in the pool! I felt the blood drain from my face as the horror

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of what I almost did, dawned on me. That dive would have killed me! Or worse yet, it wouldn't have killed me, and I would have had to spend the rest of my miserable life answering questions from my motorized wheelchair: "You can tell me Laurie, was it a suicide attempt?" Better to have died and left unanswered questions: "Do you think she actually dove into an empty pool, or do you think she drowned and when they drained the pool, there she was, the suction of the draining water causing her to flatten out spread eagle?" The sound of voices brought me back to reality. "Shit!" The jazzercise class was over and all the skinny bitches were headed this way to use the showers. God what an idiot I must look like, standing in the bottom of an empty pool, goggles, swim slippers and nose clip on. Could I pass myself off as the pool inspector? "Just checking for cracks and structural defects. Looks OK, we can go ahead and fill her up." No, they wouldn't buy it. I figured the best thing was to back up the stairs; somehow I felt that way it wouldn't look so much like I was coming out of the pool, rather I was just standing there looking at it wistfully, longing for the day I could swim again. I managed to pull this off, then dashed for the sauna, just as the bitches came into sight. I pretended to shut the sauna door so it looked like I was just coming out. They wouldn't question the bathing suit as it was appropriate to wear a bathing suit and slippers in the sauna, and I quickly removed my goggles and nose clip. I walked with an air of nonchalance I did not feel, back to the locker room, dressed and wearily slunk home.

**tired** *adj.* **x.** exhausted, as by exertion.

I don't always get to eat dinner during a twelve hour shift, so I usually stop for fast food on the way home. One night, I stopped at a Wendy's, my mind preoccupied by the events of the day. I got into the drive thru lane, grateful no one was ahead of me. I pulled up, rolled down my window, and yelled out, "I'd like a cheeseburger and a biggie iced tea with lemon." Waiting for confirmation, I glanced in my rearview and noted several cars had pulled up behind me. "Got here just in time." I was becoming agitated at the amount of time it was taking to confirm my order and tell me to, "pull up to the first window." Tired, hungry and cranky, I yelled out the window, "I SAID I WANT A CHEESEBURGER AND A BIGGIE ICED TEA WITH LEMON." I realized everyone in line could hear me but I didn't care, I was getting pissed. As I glared out the window towards the box and what I thought was the speaker, my eyes focused on, "Mental Patient Apprehended And Returned To Doctors West." I glanced into my rearview and made eye contact with the patron in the car behind me. "Asshole," his gaze read. With overwhelming embarrassment I realized I had just tried to order from the newspaper vending machine. I pulled forward a few feet to the speaker and ordered. As I pulled up to the window to pick up my food, I could have sworn everyone in the entire restaurant was looking at me and laughing.

I learned a lot about myself over the last twenty years. I learned to forgive myself for being human. The mistakes I made were the result of trying so hard to be everything to everyone. Along the way I have met some very remarkable people, and I would like to share some of my experiences and wisdom with others. I am currently teaching Health Technologies at a local high school. I hope that my students carry something away with them from my class. I hope they can see the humor in situations, and laugh a little as they go through life.

The other day I was up on the maternity floor with my students. One of the labor and delivery nurses informed us that the doctor was getting ready to deliver a woman whose baby was in the breech position and she wondered, "Would one of the students like to observe?"

"What's a breech position?" one of my students asked.

"That's when the baby is born buttocks first," I instructed.

"Whoa! That's messed up," the student replied. "Is that what 'butthead' means?"

It's rough work being born butt first. After the breech delivery, the newborn baby girl cried vigorously at the injustice of it, then fell asleep, exhausted, in her mother's arms.



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