



## From the Director of the Office of Staff Wellbeing



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
FACULTY OF MEDICINE & DENTISTRY  
Department of Anesthesiology & Pain Medicine

### Comedy, Connection and Holiday Cheer from Sue

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— Hello everyone,

Couldn't resist passing on this pretty funny article by John Cleese ([click here](#))

My piece below explains how I found the article.

Do not be put off by the opening sentence.

It is not another advert for Twitter.... Or for anything else...

But if you want to skip the story and just see a cute puppy, that's fine, scroll to the end!

I found the John Cleese piece via the Twitter feed of a man I met in 1987.

I was thirty, he was fifteen. We have not met since. Here is our story.

Darren was a tough, scrawny, soccer playing kid from the East End of London. I was an anesthesia registrar at the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases, Queen Square in London. One evening in September Darren was admitted with acute, rapidly ascending paralysis and ended up in ICU on assisted ventilation with a tracheostomy.

Over the next few weeks there was no clear aetiology and sadly no improvement. Darren, his doctors and his family slowly began to realize his quadriplegia was permanent. Back then, weekend anesthesia call in the UK was in house for 72 long hours.

One evening, I wandered into the ICU to pass the time with the nurses. I started chatting with Darren and quickly discovered that we shared a passion for David Bowie! That was it. We spent hours and hours, late into the night, hanging out, chatting between ventilator breaths and bonding while watching Bowie videos together.



That autumn I had failed the UK anesthesia fellowship exam for the third time. The pass rate was 18% but most people squeaked through on their second or third attempt. I could not see a future in anesthesia. I resigned the residency, sold my flat and left England for a 7 month overland trip with 20 strangers across Africa, the Middle East and India. Fully intending to live in Nepal and to abandon anesthesia for good.



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I remember the day I walked out of the hospital for the last time. I have never felt such a complete sense of relief. The cliché of a weight removed from my shoulders is exactly how it felt. I was free and certain I had made the right decision. But I also remember that I cried all the way across the Square and down Charing Cross Road. My only regret was leaving Darren.

Eventually Darren went home, grew up and completed a degree at University College. He lives in his own home with the support of carers and is a computer geek. I met and married Tim on the trip, came to Canada and the rest is history!

Every year for the last 30 years Darren and I have exchanged cards at Xmas. I received mine today complete with a photo of his new cute dog called Barley. Every year I remember Queen's Square, and Darren, me and David Bowie. A connection between unlikely people.

And every year I remember a very ordinary boy with extraordinary courage and determination.

I think the holidays are about people, family, friends and memories.

Of course not every memory is warm and fuzzy and cute like Darren's puppy. Or includes Bowie!

But hopefully each year we have a chance to create some new ones.

So here's to us making connections and happy memories this holiday season.

Perhaps in unlikely places with unlikely people!

All good things, Sue

Sue Reid  
Director, Office of Staff Wellbeing  
Department of Anesthesiology & Pain Medicine

