

Transcripts

Portraits of Faith

Medicine: The Wellcome Galleries

Faith Portraits 3.1 – Longing for a Child (Tabitha Moses)

Tabitha

I remember saying to my sister: “Oh it'll be lovely if we have a baby, it's not the end of the world if we don't and I can't imagine having IVF or anything like that”, thinking it was really extreme. But quite early on I got pregnant and that changed everything.

For that pregnancy I didn't entertain the idea of miscarriage, I thought “Oh that happens to other people”. Almost like I'd been thinking, infertility happens to other people, not to me. And even though I was pregnant for only four weeks no matter when the miscarriage happens you don't only lose the tiny tiny fetus which is barely even a person arguably, you lose the whole potential of the future of your life and that person's life.

I had a conversation with someone I knew whose daughter had been made with a donated egg. And so, it didn't seem like the crazy freaky thing that it

had previously. And then so we decided to do that because it was the only other way it seemed to become parents.

Everyone says it's an emotional rollercoaster but that's what it feels like, the hope and then the bitter disappointment.

I was interested in the magical thinking that was happening at that – those – during those years of uncertainty and how the objects how I'd put my faith in certain objects as a as a way of sort of trying to live with that uncertainty. So, on the gown you've got objects like little fertility figurines that friends had sent me. Not – I'm not religious in any other way but there was something about someone else who was out there in the world putting on good fertile thoughts my way that seemed important. There's a picture of an acupuncture body map which has got the points on the body that were being treated during my menstrual cycle.

At the top there you've got the embryos as well, the two pairs of embryos from the first two goes of IVF and then right in the center, which is the thing that I

was really putting my faith in, it's the donated egg. And then you could see the little sperm trying to get in there and fertilize it.

And then you've got the fertility drugs as well, because I feel like having IVF, go in for IVF was an act of faith at my age.

I can remember it was about five o'clock in the morning. So I got woken up really early and I'd gone to the bathroom and done the pregnancy test and remember just sitting there in the sort of half light of the door and waiting for the result. And then oh my God. Joy of joys! It was the faintest, faintest line on the in the little window.

Faith Portraits 3.2 – Placing Trust (Mohammed Bashir)

Mohammed

My name is Mohammed Bashir. I am 23 years old and live in Dharavi, where I've been working as an embroiderer for about 12 or 13 years.

I first visited the bonesetter's clinic a few days ago because I fell from some stairs and my foot has been bothering me since. I came here in the hope that I will feel better. I've not been here for treatment before, but my friends have, and they were cured.

You know, the day I fell I went to see a doctor. It was an emergency; the pain was unbearable. The doctor took an x-ray of my foot and told me that nothing was broken – the swelling of my ankle was because of the fall. But I was finding it difficult to walk, and when things still hadn't improved after two weeks I decided get my foot checked here by Salim.

If I have a cold or a fever, I go to a doctor. If you have a broken bone, you need to go to a doctor. But for a sprain or minor injury, I'd go to a bonesetter. Money is not an issue; the priority is to get better.

The first day I consulted him, Salim removed the bandage on my foot and examined it. Although he had not yet seen the x-ray, as soon as he touched my leg he knew that it wasn't fractured. He massaged my foot that day which really reduced the pain, and that's the reason why I am now able to walk. Salim asked me to return with my x-ray the next day so that he could look at it and then treat and dress the foot accordingly. I showed him my x-ray yesterday.

Of course, when I came here the first time, I don't know why, but I knew my leg was going to be healed. The one thing I knew was that no one in this world can do what Salim is doing. Maashaha Allah [God willing], I am going to be better from here on. The treatment itself, the massage, did not hurt too much, because the way the bonesetters' massage, you don't feel much pain.

I work nearby and pass the clinic often while going to the train station. You see lots of people coming here and I heard that all of them were cured. I've also accompanied my friends who have come here for treatment. When I got hurt, my friend had told me that doctors won't be able to do anything; I should just come straight here to the bonesetter and get him to treat my foot and everything would be fine.

Now if I see or hear that someone has been injured, I will bring them here myself! Salim has got good, experienced hands; he knows what he is doing.

Faith Portraits 3.3 – Confronting Fear (Roger Pebody)

Roger

So, I noticed a kind of odd lump like on the side of my neck, so I saw my GP and he sent me for tests and... then a lot more tests and a lot more tests.

So, it's throat cancer. It started in my tonsil.

The normal thing that everyone would definitely get would be six weeks of radiotherapy. So again I kind of remember lots of appointments, you know, and one of them was definitely like you come in and they're going to mould this mask to your face so that it sort of couldn't fit you into exactly the same position.

But then it turns into this thing of rigid plastic and then - they have to put it on and you've got to lie on this thing and they've got to screw it down, and they really have to screw it right down so it goes right against your face.

Sometimes it got a bit tricky to breathe. I had sometimes had friends come with me and they said that when they were putting the mask on my breathing would all, they could just see on my chest that my breathing was going much faster than usual.

And it looks pretty ugly, you know, it kind of looks a bit like a death mask which is a bit weird because obviously this is part of what's kept me alive. In the first few days I really wanted to always have a friend there. But then I guess I got more comfortable and familiar with the staff and kind of knew, knew what was going to happen.

I trust in science, I kind of you know understand a little bit about how that process works and it's based on evidence and I think you've got to look - look at that yourself. The treatment is kind of horrible if you don't have some faith or some sort of trust that it is going to work or that it could work.

I mean my absolute fear was this thing about having a feeding tube. Because what it definitely does to absolutely everybody is it kind of creates all kinds of ulcers in your throat that make swallowing food quite

difficult. You know, I've spoken to people who couldn't have water and they basically have to have like a tube that goes through your nostril and goes down into your stomach which food you know like, nutrition - it's not really food - and I just thought in terms of being able to carry on with my life and recover. That just sounded like the worst.

Actually one, one thing that my boyfriend did which was. Yeah. I mean he was - it was lovely and he really just decided okay I need to work out I need to be creative and think about how he is going to feed me and how he was going to keep me on track. He made this... He is French and he made this French stew. It's called a blanquet de veau, it's like a veal stew. But the whole point is it's bland and it's soft and it was, and it is also real food. It's not like a nutritional shake thing. And yeah when he made that that was that was very lovely, very special.

Faith Portraits 3.4 – Waiting and Hoping (Janette & Sophie Proud)

Janette

I was told I would never have children. And then I was pregnant and poorly. And at twenty-three weeks I went into labour. And I went into labour at my local hospital and was transferred on a 999 ambulance to the RVI. If that hadn't happened, then neither twin would have survived because the machine that actually saved Sophie's life, our local hospital didn't have any.

Neither baby was shown to me, they were whisked straight away and then I was put into recovery. And then Sophie was taken up to the intensive care, to the neonatal unit, and they came in and said that Beth wasn't doing great. Beth was baptised in my arms and then I was asked to give permission for them to stop with Beth, so I agreed.

It wasn't until about 11:00 o'clock at night that I was allowed to see Sophie, and that was only because I insisted. and she was smaller than my hand, her eyes were still fused, her skin was transparent. And the cot, the incubator, I couldn't really see I wasn't allowed to open, I wasn't allowed to touch, I wasn't allowed to open the doors and it was filled with moisture.

It's awful. It really is an awful experience to go through, especially I'm a really "mummy" mummy. And it was just every single instinct that you have is just denied. You can't do this, you can't do that. And it's really hard, and when you are not there, I used to think something was going to happen to her and I wouldn't, I wouldn't know. And all you can do is provide milk. So I would be absolutely neurotic about going on the breast pump.

And I talked constantly, and this senior nurse noticed that when I talked to Sophie she made more effort herself to breathe. So she suggested that I made a tape, a recording of me just rambling on to her all day and that was played to her overnight so that she would make more effort on Trigger herself. That comforted me because at least I thought, well she's got my voice overnight.

And when Sophie was on the unit, she had a nickname from the doctors called Stroppe Proud, because she would just defy all odds all the time. And they said that she wouldn't survive, she did. She's never been to special school and she's got a first-class bachelor science degree.

Sophie

So, I'm Sophie Proud and I'm Janette's daughter.

It's quite surreal to end up doing what I'm doing, as a neonatal nurse now, its like a full circle really.

I always am careful saying that I was born early.

I don't want them to assume that their baby is going to have exactly the same outcome as I did.

Because you can't always predict the outcome.

But occasionally, if it's appropriate I would say

"I was born at twenty-three weeks and I'm doing okay". I think it is it's getting that balance right in

between giving them too much hope and just giving

them that little bit of hope that they need sometimes.

Faith Portraits 3.5 – Performing Pilgrimage (Shayma Zaman)

Shayma

I started experiencing eating problems when I was roughly around 14. So what happened was my grandmother actually passed away and I think she was like a second mum to me and I just feel like you know maybe that was something linked to my eating.

And I was eating once and what happened was I choked on a piece of meat and I choked really bad that I actually turned blue. And I couldn't get my breath back.

And since then actually I think I developed a fear I think it was of me choking. It got to a point that I used to really struggle to swallow. The doctors actually said something to me which was if you go down the route that you're going you won't be alive 'til 21.

One of the five pillars of Islam is performing Hajj pilgrimage. So I remember crying to my dad and I said, you know my wish is to go to that place Dad,

I don't want to die and I'm scared now I'm really scared and I really want to see that place with my own eyes and maybe I might get better. And he said God loves you and you will get better and I promise you we'll go to that place.

I remember someone saying to me that, Shayma know that you have been accepted when your eyes have set on the Ka'aba. Remember to make as many prayers as you want because it is said that when your eyes are set on the Ka'aba, the first prayers that you make are accepted. So, I had that in my head like my first prayer would be you know for me to be one of the first prayer would be me to be cured.

And I remember while walking walking walking I felt a breeze coming to me and I can smell the scent of the Ka'aba, and I just looked up and I fell on the floor and I started making as many prayers as I could on the first glance.

While I was performing Hajj after about two, one and a half weeks or so, what happened was I sat down with everyone and I started putting mouthfuls of rice in my mouth. And bear in mind I haven't done that for so long you know. I slowly slowly started... you know having some sort of, I don't know, I wasn't scared of food anymore. It was a little bit, it was a few mouthfuls, but it was so, you know I knew that I was being cured.

There was one specific thing that I bought and it was just near the Ka'aba. It basically looks like a Ka'aba and if you open it up it's a little tiny book which is the whole Qu'ran. When I look at this object it just brings back, floods back so much memories of when I was actually near it.

Faith Portraits 3.6 – Taking a Leap of Faith (Moreen Lewis)

Moreen

People sometimes think that once equipped with an artificial kidney it's all plain sailing, that you just hop on and off the machine like a rush-hour commuter jumps on and off a bus. But it's not really like that at all.

When I first heard that I had kidney disease I was shaken and I was distraught. Then I went into hospital for three and a half months, fully hopeful that the disease would be arrested. But sadly, the battle was lost, and I was given a few months or a few years to live. But thanks to my rediscovery of my faith, I was able to reconcile myself to this. I knew there was nothing that could be done medically, but there was one thing I could do inwardly – prepare myself to face the end with dignity, whenever it came. I had heard friends vaguely discussing the possibilities of a kidney machine to keep me alive, but I felt no joy whatsoever at this news. You see, by

this time I was in a wonderful mental and spiritual state. I was quite happily anticipating death, even looking forward to it. I think I was ready. And then I am told the fight is to go on.

My first home dialysis on the machine we named Dr Who was going splendidly, and it looked as though the whole ten-hour session would be a complete success. However, when I got to within half an hour of finishing, then suddenly the pipe from the water softener slipped off, and water just gushed out all over the room. Mother didn't know what to do – she could not turn off the water, and though we could have switched off the machine, we did not know what effect this might have had on my dialysis.

Mother ran into the street where she saw a plumber who had been working on the estate nearby.

Thankfully he raced up and turned the water off.

Apparently, the water had flooded through the ceiling of our new lounge below, and everything was in an awful mess. It was certainly an incident I will always remember of first home dialysis; the first of a number which I was later to encounter on Dr Who.

Fortunately I have never had a really bad accident, such as muddling the lines up, and seeing blood shoot off down the waste pipe instead of through the kidney in the normal way – that's something that has nearly caused the loss of more than one patient.

The machine can be temperamental, and the patient can so easily make a careless slip. Because you can get into all sorts of difficulties, it struck me just how vital our telephone link was with the Centre. We only had to phone Dr Shaldon and he would be there to tell us what to do when things go wrong. It was truly amazing how he could pass instructions over the phone; he knew the machines inside and out and was soon making pretty good amateur technicians of us all!

At the beginning I let the machine obsess my thoughts, but now it's just a part my life, and it's a great life.

