

REFLECTIONS IN FAMILY MEDICINE

Asylum Body Work

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This poem describes how minor injuries to my body repeatedly called to my mind the devastating torture experienced by a man who is seeking asylum in the USA. (J Am Board Fam Med 2020;33:815–815.)

With the new razor-sharp peeler
I quickly shave off the tough waxy flaps of turnip peel
Until I pull away the tough waxy nail of my left
fourth finger.
I feel a flicker of the shadow of T's pain
When they pulled off his right second toenail in
Uganda.

I cry out when the pad of my right fourth finger
Touches the door of the woodstove as I push a big
log in.
The aloe gel I apply soothes the second-degree
blister that fades in 2 days.
They applied a hot metal plate to the back of T's
right hand
Leaving a shiny scar of third-degree remembrance.

The trainer binds an elastic strap around each ankle
For me to press backwards to strengthen my
glutes.
The elastic binds tightly and hurts with each
movement.
They made T hang from a strap around his left
ankle with his face
Over a pan of snakes. I am glad not to share those
nightmares.

I do not ruminate on T's account;
just living in my body recalls the work,
Work I choose to do for him, for others out
there,
Who, having survived, are trying to live in their
bodies.

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