



Out of the
mountain
of despair,
a stone of
hope.
m.l.k.

Przemyslaw

A Stone of Hope

**Story by: Aimee Nelson, P.A.-C.
Mayo Clinic Health System**

I have a young child who is almost five. At the beginning of the pandemic, he was about four. I work in the emergency room, so we work weekends, nights and holidays. That type of schedule can be challenging any time. During the pandemic, it got much tougher, not knowing what was going to happen and how things would need to be adjusted or how busy we were going to get. Then we had challenges with schools closing and daycares closing.

Due to my workplace exposures and the possibility of getting ill, many of my childcare providers were hesitant to take care of my son. There were challenges to making sure I had good people to care for him and continue to do my important job. We were able to get through, but there have been a lot of struggles. I have found a good core of people who are very happy to care for him and do a great job and understand the risks of my job. Through these months, I have struggled to make sure I'm doing the best for my son and to make sure I'm not exposing my son or people caring for him. I take a lot of that responsibility on myself and probably put too much stress on myself to take care of all of those around me, which has been tough. It's difficult to cope with all the extra stress I put on myself.

Throughout all this, I've learned that anxiety and depression has really made me struggle. It has made me understand a lot of my patient's anxieties, depression and struggles. I've had to humble myself and accept a lot of my weaknesses. Dealing with those things has been a bit tough. I had to go back to the basics of being a parent and a person, those things that make us happy such as spending quality time with my child, enjoying the things that make me happy, and getting back to faith as a part of healing. I had to make sure I was incorporating the people that I care about, talking to friends, getting stress out through different ways like talking to people who understand, using exercise to relieve stress, and learning what's important about taking care of yourself and your family.

I have a great support system of friends, many who work in the medical field. We've supported each other by discussing our stress. There are different types of stresses and struggles. We share good and bad about what's going on in our medical settings. It's helped remind me that we all have different struggles, but there are good things amid the struggle. It makes you appreciate what you have when you see what others are going through.

I've stepped back into my faith again. I work weekends and nights and hadn't been spending as much time in church and talking about my faith. That was left on the back burner. I had to humble myself and make it a priority as a way of caring for myself. Spending quality time with my son doing the things such as watching movies or going to the park and walking has been good.

Schooling has been rough since my son's still quite young. He has been off school, which presented bigger challenges, because this is his first year in school. Figuring out virtual school and tablets, and screen time for a four, five, or six-year-old, doesn't always go well. My son gets very attached to electronics, so we really limit that. He's an active child and doesn't sit well to watch the teacher. I feel like he would have been more successful in a regular school setting unlike what we're getting this year, but he's young and resilient. We'll get through it.

I've been working in the Emergency Department for 14 years. And prior to that, I worked on the front lines. I worked for the police department for a while as well. I'm used to running

into the flames. That's my job and I'm here to support people. I should be leading and caring for my team and caring for my patients. They need someone to help them, and that's what I've been trained to do. That's what I've worked hard my entire adult life doing, and I like to think I'm good at it. I want to take care of everybody.

Our patients' stories give new meaning to our jobs. They've made my job more rewarding in a sense, because I hear more of the personal side. I think people are lonelier. They don't have as many connections outside their home. In our setting patients want to talk more. They want to be heard and have more conversations not related to why they're being seen. Spending that extra couple minutes has really helped a lot of our patients feel that they're not as alone or secluded or isolated. I have elderly patients, and many are feeling lonely. They're not getting to see their families and their grandkids. There are concerns about being sick because they want to see their family, so I try to support them through that. Patients have a lot of fear about getting sick and getting their families sick or getting sick from their families. That has been a different aspect of caring that we've had to address this year.

We've had constant meetings and guideline changes. We've had to adjust on the fly throughout the year. I always thought I was able to accept change very well, but the constant change has been very tough. I thought that I was good at dealing with change. You get humbled by some of these experiences and things that you thought you handled well. I'm proud of how far our teams have come. Our Emergency Department staff is a family. We've been there to support each other throughout all of this, and I think the team has become stronger because of it.

Artist Susan Walsh
Mayo Clinic Health System

Susan Walsh works as a department assistant for Mayo Clinic Health System Home Health and Hospice. She works half time as part of a team that supports the department by ordering PPE, medical and office supplies; paying bills; and providing general office support. Because of her role, Susan sees MCHS working on the front line every day and admires their love and dedication to their patients and to the mission of Mayo Clinic.

I chose Aimee's story because she was passionate about the work she does. She juggles and struggles with many things, including a small child at home, caring for herself with the help of family and faith, caring for patients and patient families. I was struck by the fact the Aimee voiced that she runs TOWARD the despair, anguish, illness, death when many others chose to run AWAY. This is what I see in our Home Health & Hospice staff daily.

I knew I wanted to use outstretched hands as the focal point of my piece. I posed the hand on the right in a similar position as the hand of God in "The Creation of Adam" by Michelangelo, which is part of the Sistine Chapel's ceiling. The morning that I started working on the piece just happened to be Martin Luther King Day. I feel I was gifted the perfect theme when I heard the MLK quote "Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope." I included the "stone of hope" inside of a heart with wings signifying that hope can arise from despair and reach beyond suffering and grief. I added the birds to show that we all have many things going on in our lives, but hope is central and keeps us focused on helping others.

View all the pieces in the *Healing Reflections* [online gallery](#).