

Art: Creating a Space for Holding and Healing

Casey Wigg is a nurse practitioner at The Anita Rachlis Clinic (HIV Clinic) in Toronto, Ontario. The focus of her work as an HIV nurse practitioner is on mental health, new immigrants, gerontology and primary care prevention. She has international experience working with HIV in a home-based palliative care project in the Dominican Republic of the Congo and HIV/AIDS health promotion in Kenya.



As a teenager I experienced a dark, debilitating depression that came and left within a year. Years later, I began a journey to understand where the depression came from and where it went. My psychiatrist's office was thoughtfully set up with a private entrance and alternate exit, providing me with a quiet, safe space, while waiting for my turn. In the tiny entrance way there were two seats. As a person of habit, I always sat in the same seat. Just opposite was a reproduction of Picasso's *Child with Dove*. The tender gaze of the child and the gentle cradle of the dove captured me. I purposely arrived early for appointments so that I would have time with the painting. The painting has a sad, somber

feel that could handle the emotional turmoil I presented it with. The painting could relate to my melancholy and at the same time, the peaceful child and calm dove spoke of hope. At times I could even embrace the colorful ball, promising maybe even joy as part of the journey. Picasso's *Child with Dove* was an integral part of my journey towards healing and self-discovery.

Many years later, as a nurse practitioner at a busy HIV clinic, I am now the one who is opening the door and inviting people in. Some have just been diagnosed with HIV and are full of questions and fears. Others bring with them stories of

trauma they have escaped. My office holds people's stories of success, failure, addiction, depression, anxiety and joy. I am humbled by the honesty and vulnerability with which people share their stories. I often noted that as people ventured into vulnerable topics, their eyes diverted and looked up and to the right. As they looked off, I felt that they too should have the opportunity to look into a piece of art that can create a safe space, which can hold their sadness and give them courage to speak the next words.

Those that walk through my door come from all over the world, from across socioeconomic lines, from diverse racial and sexual backgrounds. I commissioned a talented family artist to create a painting that would speak to the diversity of

my patients. Deborah Edwards (www.deborahedwards.art) is a multimedia award-winning artist with work in private and public collections in the United States, Canada and Kenya. She is best known for her watercolour paintings.

My request was not small. Deborah created *Home*, a painting that would give the people who visit my office a reprieve from the heaviness of the moment. As they divert their eyes upward and to the right, they can now look into a peaceful landscape. The fabric comes from Kenya, Africa. The painting is strong enough to hold their sadness, their hopes and dreams. Throughout the day, my eyes fall on the painting. The painting steadies me, renews me and allows me to open the door and usher the next person in.