

EVERYDAY STORIES



TOPIC EDITOR: EMILIE SIMONEAU

Occupational therapy and my memoir, *Ready to Come About*.

Sue Williams



My grandparents, while in their early sixties, the age I am now, were each diagnosed with severe progressive neurological disorders; my grandfather had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) or Lou Gehrig’s disease and my grandmother an aggressive form of Parkinson’s. They lived in a modest stone house in downtown Hamilton, Ontario. My mom and dad were their main, almost only, source of support.

While my parents cut the lawn, shopped, and banked for them, I hung around watching my grandmother shuffle about the kitchen making a Finnish staple, “pulla,” and my grandfather turn on classical music, usually Sibelius, then hook himself up to a tube connected to his liquid lunch-in-a-bag hanging from the chandelier in the centre of the living room. He had lost the ability to swallow.

Even though I was only around eight years old at the time, their struggles made me ache. But I also marveled at their ability to still find joy in their shrinking worlds, and their desire to hold on to what independence they had shaped me profoundly and forever.

In high school, I was told about the profession of occupational therapy and how it has at its core the view that there are lots of ways to live a life, the belief that autonomy and self-determination make us whole, and the assertion that

we have the right to take risks—the very values I had seen in my grandparents years before. In that instant, I knew I was meant to be an occupational therapist!

My career spanned several decades, throughout which I embraced those central values—that is, as an occupational therapist, with my clients. However, as a parent of three sons, sometimes I wasn’t so sure I could or even should completely embrace their autonomy and self-determination.

Ready to Come About is the story of my improbable year on the North Atlantic and my personal journey within, through which the mother in me also became convinced that there is no more precious gift than the liberty to chart one’s own course and that risk is a good thing...sometimes, at least.

Given the occupational therapy subtext of my book *Ready to Come About*, I emailed Sue Baptiste (professor emerita, rehabilitation sciences, McMaster University) to ask if she would be an advance reader. Her answer was an immediate “yes”!

Here is some of what Sue had to say:

Ready to Come About is totally awesome—absolutely! Sue Williams is a talented writer. She paints a vivid picture of her deeply personal journey and she conveys a wide range of emotion in a profoundly authentic manner. I found myself giggling out loud from time to time, as well as getting teary every so often.

This memoir emerges as a powerful metaphor and a testament to believing in self, taking chances, relationships, choice—I could go on. In short, Ready to Come About is a thesis on occupation and spirit.

Thank you, Sue Baptiste. Thank you to the profession of occupational therapy! And, thank you North Atlantic Ocean! There are, in fact, lots of ways to live a life.



About the author

Sue Williams earned a degree in occupational therapy from Queen’s University in 1979. She practised occupational therapy for over thirty years. In 2016, she left the health care field to focus on writing full time. She lives in Guelph, Ontario. Her website is lotsofwaystolivealife.net and she can be reached by email at: swilliams@golden.net.