

Here be Dragons: an autistic woman and clinical psychologist's reflections on narrative therapy

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Abstract

This paper is a collaboration between Hannah- an autistic person seeking therapeutic conversations- and Fran, a non-autistic clinical psychologist and narrative therapist. We are writing this paper to share some of our journey together as expressed through Hannah's therapy inspired poems. Our hope is to make visible how narrative therapy can be a powerful therapy for autistic/neurodivergent people as well as an honest reflection of the hazards we have encountered. The original intention was for this sharing to be generative for practitioners, as well as a useful reference for neurodivergent people seeking therapy. However, as the journey of writing unfolded something different seemed to emerge. It became a dive into what happened in the therapeutic space, in the relational space, how ideas were experienced, taken up and what was created in the process. We have tried to keep this writing as honest and frank as possible- it is a conversation that unfolded through writing and we have left this conversation as raw as possible, only really editing for clarity. We hope you find some connection, resonance, thoughts, questions, or perhaps something else entirely!

Often I would offer Hannah an invitation in sessions (a preferred term for question, which has connotations of needing an answer and getting it right) and she would not have a verbal answer. But several days later she would share a response in the form of a poem. Hannah had not written poetry for many years. These poems were received as gifts; they helped both of us to step closer to Hannah's felt or experienced landscape and make meaning in preferred ways. We have chosen to weave our discussions through these poems, and the form and structure we have used reflects how the poems were received and responded to.

Please note that when we refer to autistic/autistic person we don't mean having a professional diagnosis of autism but anyone with a formal or self-diagnosis of autism.

If you would like to offer any response to these poems, please do so via this QR code:



Fugue

()

Tongue, unstick! Lips, unglue!

Vocabulary, why have you forsaken me?

()

()

Trickle

Trickle

Sweat dribbling down my spine

()

Throat now at pinhole proportions

Unwilling to offer up a single syllable

()

Tick

Tick

Tick

()

You were a fountain before, a waterfall of wisdom

Now arid

(!)

Thoughts colliding, finding themselves imprisoned

Their clamouring finally producing

a

single

tear

Fran

How do we step into conversation with people?

How do we do this thing called “co-research”? (Epston, 1999)

How do we know what positions we are invited into, what positions we take up or bring, what space we are invited to share?

I’ll share a moment of conversation from an early session with Hannah:

It was my second conversation with Hannah and I became aware of long silences during our sessions. I noticed my chest drawing forwards to fill the space, which has become a reminder to me to sit back and allow more space. I know it’s more than sitting back, a resistance to colonial power telling me to do more, cover more ground, journey forwards. I notice Hannah averting her eyes from me during silences and I do the same. It feels a bit like staying close to her language, but staying close to her preferred ways of being in relationships. I need to ask something...

Fran: Hannah, I am aware of silences between us...I wanted to check in with you and see how you’d like me to meet you in these silent spaces?

In a later session, Hannah shared with me: *No-one has ever asked me where do you want me to meet you in silence.*

I wasn’t surprised as it was a strange question and I wasn’t sure where it would lead us, but I had an intention. And this intention was to try and step a little closer to Hannah’s landscape; to try and understand what silences mean to her instead of centring my own notions of silence and conversational norms and to offer agency in how Hannah wished us both to be positioned (or respond) in these silent spaces. To be more frank, I genuinely did not know what silences meant and how I should respond, and I see moments of not knowing or stuckness as opportunities to try and discover something together (Miller, 2023).

In asking this question (not as a one-off but something reinvented into the therapy space), Hannah shared that people don’t consider what these expressions mean for an autistic person and certainly haven’t in other therapies she’s partaken in. There is an idea that autistic people process verbal information slowly and this may be how silence gets interpreted, but our co-research showed up very different kinds of silences - ones that are calm, ones fraught with not finding words, ones that are processing a lot of information, ones filled with imagination, ones that are moments of seeds being planted, ones that are protest. Hannah told me she used to get lost in silences with other therapists who didn’t co-research their meanings and preferred positioning in silent spaces - and was then unable to find her way back into session.

“Would you like to take this question with you?” became an invitation that honoured the idea of meaning making as something occurring in peoples’ own time and space, not one that only happens within the prescribed conversational norms of a therapeutic conversation.

My hope in these conversations was to invite us to *do* something differently in the relationship (to meet in the “landscape of action” (White, 2007) and find preferred relationships with silence: ones that connected Hannah with her own knowledges, wisdoms, communities, experiences... and through the co-research, and my position as witness (White, 1995), the therapy allowed her preferred stories/preferred versions of self to be performed.

Hannah

Fugue wasn't the first poem I wrote in response to our conversations but it is the first one I wrote with the intention of explaining my experience to other therapists. If I'm honest, silence is always going to be one of the first interactions any therapist has with me. Ever since Fran asked me about the silences, I've wanted to find a way to explain what can be happening for me. Traditional expectations are that you will eventually provide an answer. My experience is that this just leads to an awkwardness and it compounds the feeling of there being something wrong with me. I also know I'm not the only one who feels that.

I started writing my experiences and thoughts in poems because, not to mince my words, trying to come up with any answer in the moment made me feel like an inarticulate idiot. Not because I feel everyone must have some gift with words (or even express things in words at all) but because I know that I do have that gift and it's decided to go and hide in the loos at that moment. I hope you can feel some of that frustration in this poem. Because Fran had left the space open for me to communicate in different ways and to come back to questions, sometimes after weeks of reflection, when a poem popped into my head all of a sudden, I felt enough trust had been built to offer to share it. But none of these poems would have come about had I been rushed through silences and if Fran hadn't had any curiosity as to what was going on during them. I haven't told her this before, but the fact she asked me about silence right at the beginning of our conversations made me stick with narrative therapy even when I was finding it quite confusing.

This might sound like a strange thing to say but I hope this poem makes you feel uncomfortable. If it does, then you might be able to understand something of how I feel when I'm asked a question and I know the person has an intention behind it but I haven't worked out what that is. This can tap into the stigma of many past experiences where, be it in a therapy setting or a completely different setting, misinterpreting a situation has been viewed a deficiency.

The Rewrite

Imprinted into the wrong story
 My character poorly written, bland
 The ink dried on decay and disappointment
 The pages mildewed by my frustrated tears
 The spine long since cracked, ill equipped to hold together a narrative
 So I leap from those crumbling pages
 Inscribe a new manuscript
 Gilt edged, illuminated, initials in bold hues
 Inhale the leather aroma
 Spell out adventures, dragon-full, sea monster heavy
 Renamed, reimagined or even first imagined
 Designed and protagonist-described with creative direction and purpose
 Somewhere bound

Fran

The Rewrite arrived in my inbox following a conversation where Hannah had been sharing some moments or actions that she described as “reclaiming what being myself feels like” from “worry from judgement” eyes. At the end of this conversation, I asked Hannah:

F: I wonder if we've started developing a bit of a storyline here? This metaphor may not fit, but let's try and see and you can let me know. If you were to write out the storyline of "acceptance of self and rejection of judgment" what might you want to add, both actions from your history and the things you might pay attention to and include once you leave this session?

Hannah: This is getting me thinking about lots of things. There is already something else I want to add to the story.

Fran: What difference might it make to take this storyline with you?

Hannah: It's giving me something concrete to think about now. I think it will help me to notice more. I think you might be receiving some writing.

What struck me in *The Rewrite* was the movement into fantasy and the portal of possibilities this opened up. I have a felt sense of the dominant and normative professional and societal contexts in which Hannah's character is “poorly written” and “bland”, the contexts where stories have been given to her and oppressed her; the restrictions on freedom to form a coherent narrative within these contexts. Hannah once shared that her previous experiences in therapy required “*fitting yourself into a script others have written for you*”. In this poem Hannah leaps into fantasy, into her own imagined worlds where the colour, agency and purpose of her stories can come to life and journey onwards.

Salja (2022) talks about the “landscape of possibility” to describe the use of fantasy for those who have routinely been passed over by mainstream culture. This is something that has been shown to me by neurodivergent people, where I often notice the possibilities, ideas and beliefs drawn from fantasy or the supernatural - Science Fiction, Dungeons and Dragons, Anime to name a few- and how important and generative these worlds have been for their meaning making, storytelling, community knowledges. These are worlds where characters can be imagined, with agency, purpose, direction and hope.

In narrative therapy, we think about the stories people tell. But what happens if the stories available to people don't offer the possibilities, hopes or respect that are generative and expansive for their lives. When autistic people have had many of their lived experiences within neurotypical contexts (Hannah has reflected to me that the idea of “neurotypical” contexts is a simplifying one: contexts vary hugely and her experience of being autistic in England, for example, is hugely different from her experience of being an autistic person in Wales) and when mainstream culture draws on neurotypical ways of understanding the world, they may have been offered up a set of stories - or possibilities for storytelling - that don't fit for them. More so stories that oppress, “other” and marginalise. In this poem Hannah showed me new stories needed to be written. Hannah's gilt-edged new manuscript wasn't new (or didn't seem new to me), but the initials certainly felt bolder - she was the author of her story in this world. I held a sense that moving into fantasy helped her come back to her present with more ideas for how she wished to live.

When Hannah told me the story metaphor gave her something concrete to think about, I connected with the importance of offering something clear and tangible. This might be important for autistic people, where our intentions may be confusing or unclear. But in her response in *The Rewrite*, I also realised the possibilities in stepping outside of the stories offered by dominant culture; stepping towards the possibilities offered in fantasy.

During the writing of this paper Hannah reminded me that in one of our sessions she reassured me she wasn't professing to be a magical wizard and my response was: "*what if you were/are you a magical wizard?*" I was not being facetious; genuinely I do not know if Hannah is or isn't a magical wizard. I have had experiences in my life that have challenged notions of "reality", and I believe there are many different worlds that people inhabit. But this was not the point - if we could make meaning in the world of wizardry that we'd struggle to make in a different type of story then this is the world that is most meaningful to co-research in. If we can only make meaning in the therapy room through particular types of stories then this simply becomes another form of hoops and potential failure.

Hannah

I wrote *The Rewrite* when the whole purpose of narrative therapy suddenly became clear to me without me realising it. However, it is a coincidence that it's about story. That is very much my preferred model because I love books and writing. I would prefer there to be more structure and explanation in narrative therapy but then you'd never have got this poem. Poems hold open the possibility of multiple interpretations, all of which can coexist or evolve or become more prominent.

But this poem was intended as an act of rebellion. The medical view of autism is based on deficiencies, albeit sometimes with some useful "side effects". But I actually think every neurotype has challenges and strengths and we shouldn't, as a society, be valuing one over another or assuming one is better than another. Autistic people are often told to fit into a story that is rarely questioned, even if it's not benefitting anyone. This is why examining ideas **together** matters. It also matters that this is done with an honestly open mind.

I find a lot of Western, and especially British, social expectations to be very boring. We don't seem to be born that way but all the colour, variety and flavour gets squashed out of us. The world is probably more neurodiverse than we've realised but we've been told one neurotype is dominant (I have serious doubts about that). I see this as being reflected in the types of books we read at different stages in our lives. It's no accident that my new book sounds like the sort of adventure you'd find in stories for children. Those sorts of stories can also be diminished by being called fairy stories.

However, these stories are an important part of Welsh cultural heritage and, yes, they do contain dragons. We love dragons. I certainly feel less judged where I live now and I think it has a lot to do with neat and tidy stories not being the expectation here.

There is no need for everyone's story to be a work of literary fiction or a news article. No genre is more "worthy" than another, no matter what seems to be taught in schools. The purpose of story isn't to win prizes. Variety brings us multiple perspectives and I've really appreciated Fran very clearly offering a fresh perspective without presenting it as the "correct" one. I've never received "the look" from Fran - quite the opposite! She treated my experiences and perspective with curiosity. I wasn't

infantilised or made to feel delusional. I can't imagine talking about magical wizards in any other form of therapy, whether I was claiming to be one or not. I imagine that would have been a great way to find myself on anti psychotic medication.

And if I'm not treated like something abnormal, broken, in need of fixing then I can start to uncover what I really want and I can challenge ideas and structures in society that really **are** the problem. If I don't feel guilty for being myself then I don't have to constrict people in their stories.

I imagine that a lot of people know a fair few libraries onto which they'd like to breathe fire.

Fran

Hannah and I discussed sharing some of her poems at the narrative therapy and community work conference: "journeys and hope", during a workshop I was facilitating on "the space between dialogue". Partly this was to elevate the knowledges and experiences of those routinely excluded and not privilege the handing out of my own 'professional' ideas (Zurn, 2023); partly this was a context for Hannah to be witnessed in preferred ways; partly the poems conveyed experience, knowledge and unique human moments more effectively than any words I could put together (Green et al., 2021). When I asked Hannah what her hopes were for the workshop she responded with the following poem a few days later:

However After

The fairies presented me with gifts at birth,
All less welcome than a sleeping curse following a spindle prick.

I asked for a sword and they made me a minstrel,
Instructed me in the art of the fool.

I presented myself before Kings
Whose indifference was matched only by their ignorance.

So I performed to the orphaned and the invisible,
And together we wandered from those kingdoms,
Borders undefended and uncontested,
Feasting on the sumptuous banquet that the courts had not the pallet to savour.

Reaching my repose, I rooted myself by a shaded stream
While other continued their adventure into lands this jester can conjure but through imagination
Melodies expanding, stories to unfold in their telling

Fran

When I received *However After* I was connected with something I view as sacred in my role as “therapist”, that of being a witness to other peoples’ stories. But when therapy itself is an institution that reinforces notions of normality (Middleton, 2022), it becomes imperative that my “witnessing” is also paying attention to hazards of replicating the dominant morals and discourses of time and culture. This is especially important as a neurotypical practitioner, who does not know about the experience of being neurodivergent. A question I ask myself is “what kind of a context am I offering for peoples’ stories?”, in an effort to keep accountable to the therapy room not being a mirrored room of power (Middleton, 2022).

I view the therapy space as one where notions of normality, power and their effects can be made visible and disrupted; where preferred identities can be liberated from violent and oppressive norms; and where new contexts of witnessing can be co-researched and explored, both within and outside of the therapy room.

However After connected me with finding witnesses where melodies can expand. And the particular importance for people who have been marginalised, oppressed, othered by normative contexts and societies. Hannah and I have explored different ways of doing this. Some ideas have been co-researched in the therapy space, for example through different forms of outsider witnessing; but Hannah has also embarked on recent projects to share and find audiences for her stories, within her community. For example, in a collaboration with her foster sister, she etched her poems into gold shells her sister had painted and placed them with intention along nature walks in Wales for others to discover, touch and interact with. This connected me with the power of imagined audiences as well as the visible responding audiences.

Hannah

However After is a poem about how I didn’t want to be a poet! I’ve known since I was nine that I’m good at it but that hasn’t seemed to be something positive up until now. I even did a lot of research around the reception to my first “therapy inspired” poem before even admitting to being the author. I had a strong feeling that I was expressing something that would resonate with a lot of people and I was shocked by people’s responses.

I also thought I had some creative ideas for ways to use my poetry but I can say for certain that using it to train other therapists was never on my radar! Fran offered it as a possibility and I think it demonstrates just how differently the therapeutic relationship works in narrative therapy. No other form of therapy has ever made me feel like I had something to offer. This is the antithesis of feeling broken, the problem or in some way lacking.

I would have preferred to know that this could have been a “goal” or “outcome” or possibility because it’s often been a confusing journey. A lot of the time when my husband asked if the therapy session had been useful or helpful, I’d have to reply that I didn’t know. Adding another area of confusion to life isn’t something that, as an autistic person, I’m keen to do. But how else do you get to a destination you didn’t have in mind? When all the messages you receive tell you certain routes are dangerous or not worth following, you avoid them, even if they look attractive to you.

Fran

Hannah's reflections on *However After* has me thinking about the challenge in narrative therapy, where we don't talk about "goals and outcomes" but in the context of conversations with neurodivergent people (and probably many others) it can be confusing not to. I notice my discomfort in the idea of the therapist having goals, but I do have intentions of elevating marginalised voices, connecting people with preferred identity stories and of the therapy space being one where dominant discourses and cultural norms can be disrupted. It is always uncertain how this might unfold and evolve through co-research- which is so unique to each relationship and conversational journey - but I wonder if making visible some of Lee's considerations (Lee, 2013) could help to offer some scaffolding during conversations:

- Do we have a clear understanding of the key dominant stories and the impacts they are having on the person's life?
- Do we have some alternative ideas or stories about that person when less obscured by the dominant story? Who else knows about this?
- Do we have some ideas about strengthening the connection to preferred self and identity?

(Lee, 2013, p. 4)

Glitter Tears

Woman, why are you crying?

Because

When I do, it leaves shimmer traces

And I've seen the sparkle enter other eyes

Illuminating possibilities and deepening the hue of long-held desires

I've heard the crackle of recognition and resonance

Because it's beautiful and an act of resistance

Because

Sometimes my feelings need to effervesce out of me

Sometimes the fabulousness leaks out

Feel free to stare

Take it all in

Because

I often lack the vocabulary to express that which these dazzle drops can

Because

If you get close enough

You may catch

The courage

To shed your own tears

And, after all, why not?

Fran

Glitter Tears came from a session where Hannah had some glitter in her eye. It took me to a memory where I threw a bottle of glitter over my Christmas tree one year and never had a glitter-free flat again. Hannah shared the context of meaning for this poem, but when I read it, it spoke to me about the power of being in the relationship, the power of resonance, the power in allowing the sparkle to enter my eyes and influence their gaze.

As a therapist I am very aware of power; the potential harm caused by the system of “therapy”, the “mirrored room” we endeavour to pay attention to (Middleton, 2022); as well as the power in our witnessing and resonance. I do hold particular knowledges, ideas and experiences, but I consult people I am in conversation with (and their communities) as the experts in their own lives. And above all, I strive to meet them in the space as a human, who allows glitter tears to enter my eyes. I asked Hannah early on “*what difference does it make to our conversations that I am not autistic*”, because it mattered to locate myself honestly in our co-research: to make visible experiences I may not share or understand, without expectation for them to be explained or absolving myself of striving to understand.

I was acutely aware Hannah has experienced violations of power in her life, including with other therapists. Autistic people may be more vulnerable to this, where trust, empathy and non-judgment may be readily offered, even in the context of abuse (Jones, 2024, pp.115-117). The importance of making consent explicit: “*is this question ok? would you prefer to go in a different direction*”; offering Hannah the choice of opacity alongside curiosity (Zurn, 2022): “*these questions are invitations and entirely optional*”; intentions clear: “*the intention of this question is*” did not pass me by. But I am aware of my handicap of being “neurotypical” in this context. Although I ask for feedback regularly, the inherent power differentials in therapy can make this hard to offer or even know.

Hannah

Interestingly, I’ve just said “no” to something as I’m writing this. I don’t respect hierarchy and social power in the way some people might. That’s quite probably an autistic trait of mine. It’s not that we don’t understand, we’re just not playing the power game. That means you’re going to be influenced by us too.

This poem is about tears because they’re perceived as weak. That idea is subverted because glitter sticks! (It can also hurt - my eye being a case in point!) Who really has the power in this situation? I’ve

expressed something potentially vulnerable as something that has an attractive force, a power to connect people. This was a companion poem to one about the idea of being condemned to hell by certain institutions and how challenging anyone who steps out of line can be to their sense of power. I have no intention of being less open or trusting and I think it's worthwhile a therapist considering with the person seeking therapy if they can speak and understand each other's way of communicating.

I could have decided at multiple points not to continue my conversations with Fran any more. She asked me if the fact she was from "posh England" made a difference and if our neurotypes made a difference. I told her reasons people had seen fit to mistreat me and she wanted to be clear if that was going to cause a barrier in my ability to explore things with her or to communicate with her. I remember mentioning being autistic the first time we spoke and mentioning silences. I'm used to having to point out to people some things they may not understand but it's highly unusual for anyone to see being "neurotypical" as a handicap. It's refreshing to have any professional understand that you are the expert on yourself and I think this is one of the ways narrative therapy can be beneficial to autistic people, if handled well. We don't have to have the same understanding of things, much in the same way we don't have to have the same interpretation of the poem, but it's important for that to be the expectation and for both our perspectives to be treated as valid. I didn't have glittery Christmas trees in mind when I wrote this poem but it doesn't mean it's not about them too. Before I knew what the glitter incident made Fran think of, I'd not considered anything other than glitter's aesthetic qualities but I love the additional layer of meaning that this can bring to the poem.

Fran

Discussions of handicaps connects me with a conversation where Hannah spoke to me in Portuguese and I could not understand much of what she was saying; it didn't matter because I felt I understood something when she spoke to me in Portuguese that was harder for her to express in English and this mattered more than me understanding all the words. I felt initial unease or uncertainty- how can I be helpful if I hadn't understood?- but holding "body as community" ideas in mind (Lee, 2023), I invited head to relinquish, shoulders to relax and- in doing so- other members of body community took up positions where they could only but connect with the strength of Hannah's words, the shift in her tone, the connection in her expression. When Hannah lived in Brazil she told me she did not feel "othered" due to some of her autistic traits. And she could access a particular sense of self when speaking in Portuguese that was harder to access in English.

It had me thinking about how we create or connect with contexts where people are able to perform and be witnessed in their preferred roles. Contexts where the therapy itself be the "landscape of action" in someone's preferred stories. We are not neutral, we are not passive, we are not blank slates- we are active, political agents; mostly, we are all humans.

Hannah

Mas você entendeu a coisa mais importante em tudo isso! It mattered to me that someone would just let me speak the language I needed to speak at that time and, and I can't stress this enough, make an effort to understand what I was conveying. I'm very used to having to adapt to other people because that's what's so often expected of neurodivergent people. I've spent a lot of time having to adapt my accent because my Welsh accent can be quite hard for some people to understand. Therapy can be

another tool used to make us feel guilty and problematic because we're disrupting someone's neat ideas about how people should be "fixed". Perhaps one of the biggest differences I've noticed with narrative therapy is that I've stopped carrying around a crushing sense of guilt. Years of another type of therapy never managed it.

I don't really know how to express the value of that because I've been part of so many systems that function by maintaining power through guilt. Sometimes, especially in religious contexts, it's claimed to be a kindness. But I've always been a rebel at heart and I want to wear rainbow coloured butterfly wings, dance round the supermarket, speak whichever language feels right to express something, call out people in supposed authority when they're doing a terrible job, not reply when I don't have an answer and I want to consider the question, enjoy being in the spotlight. Oh, and to write. I'd just suppressed my desire to do most of those things because they weren't seen as being acceptable parts of someone's story.

Ending poem (until we added one more...)

Fran

This next poem came from a question I offered Hannah: "*where do you find moons?*" This was towards the end of a session, when, after what felt like various attempts at trying to connect with preferred pathways, Hannah told me she just wanted to escape to the moon. I noticed feeling stuck, uncertain of how to find space, movement, expansiveness. Stuckness has often come to be an indicator that we are maybe not uncovering anything new, maybe staying too close to known and familiar stories. I was hoping to be disruptive in offering this strange question; if anything, I had nothing to lose at this stage of the session. And I was of course perhaps bolstered by my experiences of journeying alongside Hannah and knowing that often the bizarre, unexpected, fantastical spaces have been where the realms of known and familiar territories are disrupted and new, preferred meanings made possible.

Space Exploration

I'll fly me to the moon

 If I can just find it

I'm sorry if those men scared you when they stomped across your surface

 and littered your beautiful desolation

I just wanted sit quietly

And observe from a distance that transforms the chaos and mess

 into

 something

gorgeous

Why have I chosen an enigma as my escape?

I hoped you'd be reflected in the brook

But I'm failing to find its babble soothing

You eluded me in books,

Requiring more concentration than I could afford

Hunting for you in inner space has been futile

A howl of pain and frustration

And then a slice of cake proffered

A quiet companionship

Nothing asked

Nothing offered

Fellow explorers quietly join the ranks

Hannah

Yes, I said I wanted to run away to the moon. Everyone had got on my last nerve, I was exhausted, I didn't feel well and I definitely wasn't in the mood for finding solutions to anything.

We both laughed about Fran's question but I needed to find an answer because what we'd been discussing was bothering me. Obviously, moons are in space, and that's what I wanted. I felt like I'd spent nearly an hour being grumpy and ranting but not getting anywhere. I wasn't sure that I wouldn't have been better off spending the time grabbing some sleep. I still wanted to run away to the moon.

But this isn't the first time I've wondered what the point of a session has been and I know Fran had previously suggested just thinking about the questions afterwards if I want and there is no pressure to come back with an answer. I know we need never revisit the subject if I don't want to. So I let my brain work away at it in the background and I mentally invited a whole host of other women to help me out with it.

When I started to write *Space Exploration*, I was expecting it to remain unresolved. I thought it was going to be about not all questions needing to be answered. But something unexpected happened. To be honest, that's par for the course for my conversations with Fran. I feel like we've wandered down a lot of paths that we just happened to spot and ended up in some wonderful places. I should have known that trying to reach the moon would land me anywhere but there!

So, what happened? As I was writing the poem about how much I just wanted people to leave me alone, I found myself writing about how other people show up quietly to support me. I might know

them, I might not. They may be alive, they may not. They may know I've asked for their help, they may not.

There may not be a chart to fill in, or a graph, or a list of coping strategies that I've mastered, and I may have found parts of the process frustrating, but **this** is how I know that it works.

Ending therapy...

Fran

I wrote Hannah a letter to read during our final session of therapy (I don't really like the term "ending letter", as it's only the ending of something in its current form and perhaps the continuation or beginning of many other things). The letter spoke about "edges", a space in which I have often found myself during the journey with Hannah. I have often found myself at an edge of knowledge, comfort, understanding and had to bring myself into conversation at these edges: what ideas are alongside me, which ones are precious and which need revision, what happens if I shift my eyes a fraction more to the right or left, above or below, whose voices are accompanying us- whose do we want to let go of and whose do we want to invite in. I wrote to Hannah about the edges in our relationship and received this poem.

(Don't) Go Near The Edge!

Discouragement

and warnings

Pelt our backs

Begging us to reconsider

For no view is worth could be worth

The Risk

Scramble towards

e x p a n s i v e vistas

Possibilities unfurl towards the horizon

And beyond

Where we discover our capacity was

far greater than anticipated

Each time we greet the unexpected but don't hurtle to our deaths

Or flow over the edge of the world,

Tossed in an unending torrents

Apparent sharpness of the defining lines

Giving way to

a wealth of new ancient knowledge

In the rocks and the rivers,

on course to somewhere

To be discovered and remembered

Reawakened

So we approach the edge

Questioning ourselves

Trusting ourselves

Increasing ourselves

Connecting

Hannah

Sometimes I find endings really difficult. Right now I'm finding it difficult to know how to end what I'm writing. I'm worried another poem might pop up and ask to be included! Even when I plan an ending or a transition as best I can, even when the ending is that of an awful situation, it takes time to process it and to recalibrate. You know that "loud" silence when an intrusive noise has ended? It's a bit like that. I think this would have been harder for me if something else hadn't already begun rippling out (Fran's already put this really well). But it was also an edge for me. Edges are interesting places. We're drawn to them and warned away from them. We know they have the potential to hurt us. We are curious about what's beyond them. They evoke both fear and excitement. Often we've found what's beyond the edges to be surprising (some might say random). I still don't have the perfect line to end this but maybe this isn't the end anyway. I'll let you take this away with you.

Hannah's pro's and considerations list of narrative therapy with neurodivergent people

Pros

- Can and should be adapted to the individual
- No need to fit into a framework that may not work for neurodivergent people
- Doesn't treat neurodivergence itself as something problematic or needing to be "fixed"
- Not restricted to the therapy room context, so can happen in an environment that is more comfortable

- Not prescriptive in format so not reliant on instant verbal responses
- Doesn't repeat the power imbalance of other therapies
- Allows the person seeking therapy to feel they have something to offer (through witnessing)
- Allows people to trust their own instincts, wisdom and communities

Considerations

- Not structured so can be confusing for neurodivergent people
- Difficult for people seeking therapy to find anything about narrative therapy
- Requires a lot of building trust with the therapist to facilitate the direction of the therapy (although once trust is built, this is very much a positive)
- More questions than answers

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