

## NARRATIVE ESSAY

## The Weight That Grounds Me

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I am a family physician with a busy academic practice. My days are filled with patients and paperwork, with teaching and charting, with the deep responsibility of holding others' stories, often complicated, sometimes tragic, in a health care system that feels increasingly fractured. I do this work because I believe in it. But there are days when the weight of it all feels overwhelming. The EMR ever-present and demanding, pulls my attention constantly. Between documenting, clicking, coding, and responding to the inbox that never empties, I sometimes feel more tethered to a screen than to the people sitting in front of me.

In the chaos of medicine, I have found a parallel life, one that remains largely private. I am also a wildlife photographer. It's not just a hobby; it's a lifeline. In many ways, it is my secret identity. Photography is a different kind of medicine for me, one without side effects or burnout. When I step into nature with my camera, I step out of the clinic and into a different rhythm, one that is still and observant, grounded and expansive.

A walk in nature helps, of course. But for me, it's not enough. My mind races even as my feet move replaying decisions I've made, worrying about the direction of our health care system, reliving difficult conversations with patients and families. I need more than movement; I need to focus away from myself. And that's what photography gives me. It demands attention. To capture something beautiful, you must be fully present. You must slow down enough to notice the smallest flicker in the leaves, the way light changes as the sun tilts, the silent shadow of wings overhead.

My camera is not a burden. Its weight is grounding. The heaviness of the lens in my hands gives me something to hold onto, a physical counterweight to the emotional burdens I carry with me from the clinic. When I'm photographing, my thoughts narrow in a way that is meditative. The anxiety and rumination quiet. I am no longer worrying about charting or inbox messages. I am simply watching, waiting, adjusting my focus. I become a witness, not a fixer. I don't need to solve anything. I just need to see clearly.



To take the perfect photograph, I have to let go of myself. I have to tune into the world outside of me, its angles and light, its unpredictability. I have to be patient. Present. I have to notice the small things: the twitch of a rabbit's ear, the iridescence of a hummingbird, the motionless pose of a hawk in the wind. Photography teaches me to pay attention again. Not just to signs and symptoms, but to wonder.

And in those moments, the world is no longer made of EMRs and suffering. It is a world full of movement and beauty, fleeting but real. A world that heals me just by being witnessed.

Photography reminds me that presence is not just a therapeutic tool I offer to my patients; it's something I must also give to myself. It reminds me that while medicine is a calling, it's not my only one. That healing can take many forms. That sometimes, the best thing I can do for myself and for those I care for is to step outside, lift the camera, and see the world as it is: wild, imperfect, and full of light.