



Not What I Wanted At All

by Lesley Dawson

So that was that. They had accepted my resignation. Not what I had wanted at all. That dratted foreigner had won. Now what was I going to do?

It had all started so well. She had been granted a semester sabbatical to analyse the data for her thesis in the UK. At the time I was abroad myself, me, my wife and my baby son were in Belfast. I had just written to the academic Vice President asking for permission to extend our stay there, so I could upgrade from Masters to Doctorate level study. In the UK this is not an unusual request, but the AVP being American didn't understand what was going on and suspected I was trying to get out of returning to Nablus.

The absent Programme Head had made arrangements for teaching to continue in her absence and those teachers still in Nablus were to each take on specific responsibilities. Despite this the AVP's email to me had a slight triumph in its tail. He was ordering me back to the university to take over as Acting Programme Head.

My initial reaction to his email was anger and frustration. How could I get ahead of my colleagues if I didn't have a PhD. This was the gold star that was recognized by my university and there was no way that a Masters' degree (although considered a silver star) would suffice to get me where I wanted to be. As I digested the news that I could not move higher with my studies, I drank gallons of Arabic coffee and smoked endless cigarettes, much to the disgust of my wife and the distress of my small son. I even indulged in the forbidden and got through a few bottles of Irish whiskey.

As I began to calm down my wife pointed out that I had ignored the tail of the email. Three months as Acting Programme Head would install me back into the university hierarchy and maybe a possibility for it to become permanent.

So, we returned home and took up my new post. Ignoring the “Acting” part of my title I began to make the changes I had always wanted. On her return, my previous boss was supposed to act as my adviser, but I didn’t want to be advised. She eventually took the hint and moved to Gaza to a job in a Nursing College there.

Called to a meeting in the Vice Chancellor’s office I discovered that a group of Norwegian occupational therapists wanted to sponsor a degree in that profession, alongside our programme.

“After all there are many things in common, so it would make sense to offer both physiotherapy and occupational therapy” I smiled politely, vowing to have nothing to do with this project. It was with horror that I gradually realized that the headship of this OT programme had been offered to my ex- boss. She was returning to get in my way again.

The Norwegians were definitely calling the tune and suggested that the two groups of students should take modules in subjects such as anatomy and physiotherapy and social sciences together. My heart sank; I had little experience of this other profession and didn’t want to share anything with them. The Norwegians got their way, and the first group of OT students were selected. Early shared classes got underway, much against my better judgement.

Not being happy with this state of affairs I began to drop hints about the standard of the OT profession and how sharing with them would lower the standard of our qualification. Thus began a rumble of disquiet among the physiotherapists, especially the men who were very status conscious. All this irrupted into a strike of my students and as the two groups were sharing this module, it also affected the OT students. The university was in uproar, especially as I had informed the AVP that unless the two programmes were separated, I would resign.