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# Rasa's ups-and-downs to help inspire new nurses



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*Author and nurse practitioner, Rasa Kabaila... "Nurses all have many stories to tell. They're just too tired to write them."*

**Rasa Kabaila was the youngest personal carer at a war veterans home at age 16.**

"When I was 15, I did work placement in a pediatric ward and then I did another placement at a war veterans home in Canberra," she says.

“As much as I found it interesting, I found it all quite confronting.

“I was always told by people in [the war veterans home] that they hoped I would become a nurse,” she says.

“I was the youngest carer employed there at the time and I was working in the high-care dementia wing.”

Initially finding the work “back-breaking” and “emotional”, it was only after Rasa found herself working at a liquor shop in college that she began to appreciate how meaningful working as a nurse had been.

“It changed my world,” she says.

“It changed my perspective on everything very quickly.”

A self-professed party-girl in high school, Rasa says she threw herself into work experience to try to find her next steps after realising she’d neglected her studies.

She reflects on her Canberra nursing experience in her book *Put Some Concrete in your Breakfast: Tales from Contemporary Nursing*, a book she wished had existed when she graduated as a new nurse.

“We have a shortage of nurses and we also have a huge rate of burnout for existing nurses in the community,” she says.

“The book talks about all the different parts of nursing, including all the challenges, but the overall message is that despite all the challenges within the profession, it’s still a profession worth pursuing.

“Nursing involves a lot of different things.

“It’s heartwrenching stories, it’s weird stories and it’s uplifting stories.

“There are a lot of challenges within the profession and I wanted to have a book that captured all of those different elements.”

Now in her thirties and working as a mental health nurse at her own practice, Rasa says no amount of studying in university could have prepared her for the realities she would face.

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“It’s such a change in your life that I don’t think anything can really prepare you,” she says.

“I was never that sure about it when I was studying, because it’s very hard to be able to apply things from a textbook without having real life experience.”

Rasa teamed up with some of the nurses she had worked with during her time in the public sector to talk about their experiences and stories.

“Nurses all have many stories to tell,” she says. “They’re just too tired to write them.”

Rasa’s book discusses her own experience with things such as death, burnout, strange encounters, psychosis, odd experiences and blame.

“It’s a hard adjustment when you graduate, because you just feel like you don’t know what to do when you suddenly find yourself taking care of other people,” she says.

Rasa’s main piece of advice for new graduates is to surround themselves with a support team.

“I would encourage those nurses to restore their energy from all the things that [they] give other people,” she says.

“I see nurses coming through, who are just so vibrant, they’re beautiful people, they’re caring, so enthusiastic and intelligent and they’re the ones that are really at risk of getting taken advantage of and getting swallowed up by the system.”

Nearing the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, Rasa experienced intense moments of burnout, something she's incredibly passionate about preventing in other nurses.

Now acting as a nurse practitioner, Rasa has rekindled her love of being a nurse.

"I'm focusing on enjoying the little things, and I'm starting to do that more and more," she says.

"Happiness is in the journey and it's the little things that count."

Rasa credits her experience as a new nurse to the various mentors she had along the way, many of whom she speaks about in her book.

Now armed with a wealth of experience, she wants to encourage the next generation of nurses to enter the workforce with an understanding of just how valuable they are.

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