

**Essay winner****Name:** Molly Case**Studying:** Adult Nursing third year at University of Greenwich

I spent much of my time studying for my first degree underground. That is, in the subterranean gloom of Bath's cellars, listening to poetry, stepping up to the mic and birthing my own. The air smelt of wine and kerosene and the honey-coloured stone was always moist from the rain coming down from the valley. It was three years studying Creative Writing and English Literature and all I had to do was read and write every single day. Perfect.

During this time I took a job as a care worker looking after people with dementia. This was a job that was to have a deep and profound effect on me. The stories I heard and the people I met were things I'll never forget. I was humbled, privileged, overcome with sadness and joy all in one shift, and knew that something inside me had changed forever. After graduating, travelling, all the while continuing to write, I knew that there was more I had to learn, something else I had to do. That seed of a feeling took root within me and was trying to grow – I knew I had to let it.

In the May of 2012 I began a degree in Adult Nursing. And this was when that final part of me, that cut-out piece of land that had been drifting somewhere for 24 years came and slotted neatly into place. I had found something that made me realise what our life is about. Doing a nursing degree has given me a unique insight into another world. I have been able to support people in their most vulnerable times, a woman spending her last night in a hospital bed, who would never see her daughter's wedding day, her first grandchild being born, whose never-ending family visited throughout the night to help her through the awful pain of it. We watched them paying their last visits, a farewell from a brother, a last kiss with their mother – this was a holy love, a love like no other I'd seen before. As students we made everyone cups of tea throughout the night – it was the least we could do.

I never thought it would be possible to combine my two degrees but in 2013, it happened. Standing in front of 5000 healthcare workers I performed my spoken word poem 'Nursing the Nation' to them; a response to the unrelenting bad press all NHS workers are getting and a celebration of what we do. A standing ovation and 340k YouTube views later, I was celebrating my two loves: poetry and nursing at Buckingham Palace with the queen!

Being able to write and nurse every day is what I live for and I never would have taken this path if it wasn't for university. Florence Nightingale let that seed of a feeling grow too, I think of her words when I think of university: "never lose an opportunity..." she said, "however small, for it is wonderful how often...the mustard-seed germinates and roots itself."