

It's always the same when a helicopter arrives.

With a perfect vantage point from the ED waiting room the helicopter makes an announcement to those seated that they will be waiting a little longer. During these times I never have to apologise for the long wait to the patients - it's an unwritten rule. The noise is deafening and the building shakes just a little.

Everyone is distracted by the loud commotion and feelings of dread that seem to herald the arrival. People's chest infections, rolled ankles and ear aches always settle just a little more when the big bird drops in.

It's on their faces. Someone is sicker than me. Oh... I hope it's not someone I know; maybe it's someone I know. Maybe if I keep an eye out I'll see someone I know.

Small towns are like that.....We've had three helicopters in this week.

As a nurse, numerous feelings are aroused in me by the helicopter. Feelings of excitement that we are being rescued, that someone bigger than us seems to think we are indeed in need. No more coping on our own, the weather and timing is on our side this time.

Thank goodness they are here! I embrace and welcome that feeling of awe. Surely those men and women are cleverer than me? They must be, who could land that thing on a small square like that between the buildings. Who could ride in that small claustrophobic piece of metal with complete confidence that the pilot will land on that mark.

The people inside it of course...

I've never really met a nasty retrieval team, cocky yes, sometimes a touch arrogant, but never mean. They have a job to do - their adrenaline is pumping, they are on a mission.

My motto: "Always listen to the things people are saying to you, the instructions of what they need. Don't get caught up in the emotion of how they make you feel. Lots of energy is wasted this way" So in emergencies, clipped tone and high pitch are not directed in a personal way, it a symptom of the pace.

Such an oxymoron to say I love the sound of the helicopter, because it means we are busy and that someone is very sick, relatives are distraught and that life hangs in the balance.

My husband has a light plane and flying does interest me. With a son in the military I often try to conduct a little survey. "Are you ex-military?" I warily ask the helicopter pilot. At least 50% have been trained by the navy or army. It always makes me feel better. I know there's no logic in that, just a knowledge that, based on my sons account, all checks and balances are done and done again. There's something about the feeling that there is a minimal risk....of adverse outcome. The civilian pilots are just as amazing, it's just that for the ex military, my mind says.....if they dodged a bullet in Afghanistan and landed in the desolate mountains on a rock, they must be good, really, really good. Crazy I know, defies logic I know, I just have this mindset of admiration. They will reach their destination and broken families cling to hope of restoration, previous to this episodes madness.

I was fortunate to visit The Grand Canyon a while back and my "get out of your comfort zone" husband convinced me to take a ride over the Grand Canyon in a helicopter. The saving grace was my seat beside the pilot, and so predictably my long established pattern of enquiry soon started. Ex- Military? "Yes - I flew lots of sorties in Vietnam. It was a crazy time". Instant relief and feelings of certain survival kicked in and my view of the Grand Canyon was enjoyed so much more.

To return to the moment and remove myself from reminiscing: Mostly at some point in the retrieval at hand, after stabilisation (unless they scoop and run because of the dire situation) we can sometimes chatter over the proceedings.

On one such occasion when the team had stabilised the patient well and continued to discuss options and destination with the relatives, I struck up a conversation with the helicopter pilot. They always linger peripherally, to assist with PAT slide, carry bags and generally do more I am certain, than their job description says.

We always offer a cup of coffee or something to sustain them. It's not uncommon in the west to be going continually, there is so much need – I want the next hospital to get them in good shape too. We have to share them with lots of others; they have to be at their best my internal voice chirps.

I was trained in an era where coffee or tea fixed everything, and can't quite let that go. It makes for the revealing of some interesting or even confronting information.

My pilot on this coffee date, after the initial, yes ex-military, I flew in Afghanistan and Iraq story, then revealed that his commitment to humanity encompassed supporting Destiny Rescue.

So my lesson began. Who are they, what do they do? .....He has been to Cambodia, assisted with rescuing and visiting children saved from child sexual slavery.

Ok, so now he truly is superman. Conversations abound covering subjects as diverse as the way these children are given over with complete trust by remote villagers with a promise they will be schooled and cared for.

I can't believe I'm hearing yet another account that acknowledges to me that we live in an amazing country. We are flawed in many ways as a nation however our opportunities and healthcare far exceed those like Cambodia.

Incredibly often these conversations are over in only a few minutes, then the bubble bursts and they have to leave with goodbyes and thank you for coming lines.

We are a team, diverse and incredible. Me: a small cog in the wheel of a system I love. Yes it's flawed; yes at times we will do better tomorrow.

Despite all that I am eternally grateful for the goodwill and expertise we have access to.

I so admire the retrieval service. I know that each time they return we will be confronted, amazed and grateful along with many other emotions all thrown in, until next time the big bird drops in to save us all over again.