

# ELSIE AND THE PUKE

By Kamala Puligandla

Kamala Puligandla is 23 and lives in North Portland. She went to Oberlin College where she earned her BA in creative writing. As you're reading this, she's probably pondering what to eat next.

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It wasn't funny the first time that Elsie was puked on. She was riding on the light rail when a tiny pink child wrapped in a blanket, hung over the shoulder of a smallish old woman, opened its tiny little mouth, whimpered and then sprayed a yellow goo all over her shoulder. It was unexpected, indeed. Elsie had stared at the puke for a long time, trying to tell herself that it wasn't exactly puke, it was actually just "spit up". I mean the kid obviously was not a consumer of solid foods. But what was the difference between puke and spit-up anyway? It was still partially digested food. The main difference was that she often heard mothers cooing over their babies with wipes in hand saying, "ohhhh, looks like Timmy has a little spit-up, yes he do, yes he do!" and Elsie had never encountered quite the same endearing cooing in reference to genuine puke. The incident had ruined a perfectly good day and she had to ruin her perfectly good outfit, by taking off the spit-up afflicted cardigan.

It wasn't funny the second time

that Elsie was puked on. She was walking to meet a new friend who she had made in the soup aisle of the grocery store. They had both decided that Steak and Potato soup was far superior to its close cousin, Pot Roast and Potato, but still not as good as the classic Beef and Vegetable, which also featured potatoes, though less prominently. Anyway, it turned out that he lived up the block from Elsie and so she was meeting him at their friendly neighborhood bar, Emergency Exit. Elsie was standing on the corner, waving to her new friend, Noah, when a cab came screeching to a stop right in front of her. Elsie hardly had time to process this, before a door was flung open and a head popped out, heaving loudly as it erupted clumps of brownish red onto her shoes and leg. The body connected to the puking head was lying crumpled and sideways on the backseat of the cab. "Indian food!" the head moaned, only half apologetically, Elsie thought, before the cab flew off again and the door flung shut. Elsie was aware of the bitter sour puke odor before she even looked to check out the damage. It did slightly reek of Indian food, now that it had been mentioned. Noah continued to stand on the other side of the street, trying not to look disgusted and offered her a shrug.

It wasn't initially funny the third time that Elsie was puked on, but it became funny for no other reason

than that Elsie needed it to be. It had been a little ironic at least. She had finally gotten over the Indian food puke incident, admitting to herself that Noah might still want to be her friend, even though he had witnessed the puke-and-run as well as her screaming and running away, which had left a trail of puke from the corner to her front door that stained the sidewalk for days. He had already seen her at her worst, she figured, so it could only be up from here. They were at an Irish pub where the bartender kept referring to Elsie as "lassie" in a French accent, so that she couldn't tell what he was saying the first few times. Noah was turning out to be a good drinking buddy and Elsie was in the midst of expressing her relief that he was able to keep up with her, shot for shot, when Noah coughed suddenly and Elsie, making a fatal error, leaned over to rub his back, so that when the fountain of beer and whiskey lurched from his stomach, it ended up on her face. Elsie wiped her forehead with her hand and then patted Noah on the cheek with her puke hand. He was apologizing profusely and trying to mop up the puke with tiny cocktail napkins. "Stop," she said pushing him away. "Just let me wallow for a moment." She felt the weight of the puke on her face, took in the now familiar odor of stomach, and laughed. The bartender mumbled something and poured her another drink. Her old one had puke in it.

It wasn't funny the fourth time that Elsie got puked on because by now it was sad. By now she knew not to sit next to babies, or even children, on the train, in the park, in restaurants, especially if there were sweets like ice cream nearby. There had been a near puked-on incident at the ice cream shop where Elsie often went on Sunday mornings to read and indulge in her favorite: a sundae on Sunday. But she had ducked out of the way in time. The fourth time, she should have known. Really, what was she thinking? She had already cut down on her nights out, having become suspicious of the friends that she regularly drank with, out of fear that one of them might puke on her and ruin their friendship forever. (Noah had been nixed). It should have occurred to her that a late night movie was just asking for it. But it was Thursday night and she wanted to relax and the old dollar theater was having Zombie Weekend Extravaganza. So at 11:30 she sat down at the theater with a bag of popcorn and her friend George and proceeded to watch hoards of zombies carry away a little girl in a nightgown, then attempt to eat her. It was when the screen turned into a spinning spiral of red and electric green, the

spiral spinning faster and faster, that the kid eating pizza behind her lost it. Elsie took the projectile of tiny pizza bits and Coca-cola right to the back of the head. George, unscathed, looked at her apologetically, but couldn't keep from laughing. George pointed to the kid in the row behind Elsie and threw a few napkins at him, he looked high school age and completely humiliated. Two girls with straightened hair and pedicures had scampered from the row when the puking had begun. Elsie felt the puke dripping down the back of her neck, sinking into her scalp, the sting of acid. She thought she should have passed out or at least screamed. The smell was so putrid and heavy, but she was still staring at the movie screen, unable to move, following the zombies with her eyes.

The fifth time that Elsie got puked on was very funny. At least to Elsie. She had begun to feel depressed, as if the god she didn't believe in was trying to show her that he hated her. There was a nervousness about her these days that she didn't like, and her friends had started to keep their distance, frightened that they might receive a dose of puke meant for Elsie. She had taken to wearing galoshes and a plastic fireman's hat to work, which had earned her a talking to from her boss. On the weekends or after work, when she could go around in all rubber or plastic or other puke repellent materials, she felt more confident outdoors and around people. The fifth time Elsie got puked on, she was taking a bouquet of flowers to her mother for Mother's Day. She was outfitted in her most puke repellent brown and orange poncho, which she knew was hideous, but what was the point of looking nice anymore?

"Hey lady," an old bum on the street called to her from where he was leaning against a brick wall. "Spare me some change? I want to get something nice for my mama too!"

"Sorry!" Elsie called out as she walked by him.

"You people are disgusting! Can't spare ten cents, makes me want to puke!" the man roared at her.

Elsie stopped in her tracks. Did he just say puke? She turned to him, flowers in one hand, the other on her hip. "Makes you want to puke, huh? How *bad* does it make you want to puke? You know what makes *me* want to puke? I'll tell you: how lightly people seem to take puking! You want to puke, I dare you to puke on me," Elsie challenged the man.

The man looked a little startled for a minute, but stared Elsie in the eye. His eyes seemed to roll back for a moment and then with a chest heave, he sputtered some clearish, whitish

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# MEDITATE FROM PAGE 12

article right now you're waiting on the MAX to get to your destination. You could be using this time to meditate.

The simplest and most basic meditation technique is to notice your breath. So take a moment right now as you're riding the MAX to just observe your breath. Bring your awareness to your breath. Or you could notice the scenery around you. Notice the colors and shapes. Notice the aliveness in your hands

or feet. (These are other meditation techniques)

**TIP #2-** Pick a Daily Activity to Meditate

Pick a daily activity that you can incorporate meditation into, like brushing your teeth, showering, emptying the dishwasher, folding the laundry, etc. When you brush your teeth in the morning take a few moments to notice your breath. When you shower, pay attention to the feel of the water moving over your face

or head. When you empty the dishwasher notice the placement of each dish, feel the aliveness in your hands as you put the dish away.

**TIP #3-** Have your dog or cat be your meditation

Many of us are pet owners and don't realize that our dog or cat can be our meditation. When you walk your dog have you noticed how your dog is just fully in the moment; taking in everything? Well you can do that as well! Next time you're

walking your dog "take in" your surroundings. Notice the colors and shapes of the trees, houses, etc. Feel your feet as they touch the concrete. Or next time you pet your cat, notice the feel of the fur and in your hand as you pet him or her.

Our lives can literally be a meditation. Those moments we spend throughout the day while we're waiting, doing a daily activity or walking our dog really matter. If you implemented these three simple tips you'd have a regular meditation practice and you would notice a difference in your life. You'd experience more joy, more peace and less stress!

So why are you waiting when you could be meditating?

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pukish globs onto Elsie's poncho.

"That's it!" she screamed at him. "That's all you got!"

He heaved his chest a few more times, but nothing came out. His shoulders hunched a little and he went back to leaning against the wall.

Elsie felt the rage inside of her. She stared at the globs on her poncho, slowly sliding to the sidewalk and thought of all the previous puke that had slid down her body. Suddenly she was gripped by a stinging inside her chest, a tensing of her stomach. "Aaaaauuuggghh," she felt herself moaning before a stream of puke landed at the bum's feet. Elsie kept on moving down the street, she sprayed a mailbox and two men in business suits, she stumbled over to a stroller and emptied a load on a mother and her child, she scattered a crowd of pigeons and a group of skateboarding teenagers before collapsing onto a bus stop bench. She breathed heavily, her body felt weary, but she was very relieved. When they were sure that Elsie had finished puking, a group of people approached her: "Are you okay?" "Wow, that looked bad." "Hey, are you feeling all right?" "You know, I've got Pepto Bismol in my purse." "No, tums are better, I've got tums!" Elsie waved them off. "I'm fine. I'm great. I've never felt better," she sighed wistfully. She put down her flowers and began to remove her layers of puke repellent clothing. The fear that had lived inside of her for weeks had finally come out and she felt freer than ever. With a confident toss, she left the poncho, galoshes and plastic fireman's hat in a nearby trashcan and went to deliver the flowers to her mother. They're just a little pukey, she thought, but they're still perfectly good flowers.



## The *FIGHT BACK EXPRESS* Is Rolling Into Town

Cancer will kill an estimated 565,650 people in America this year. The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) is building a grassroots movement united in its mission of making cancer a top national priority. As part of a six-month, 48-state tour, the Fight Back Express bus will stop in cities throughout the country, rallying cancer patients, survivors, loved ones, family and friends to encourage elected officials to fulfill their essential role as partners in this fight.



**Seaside – Saturday, August 23, 3:15pm - 4:45pm**  
Seaside Convention Center Parking Lot - 415 1st Ave., Seaside, OR

**Longview – Sunday, August 24, 5:30pm - 6:30pm**  
Triangle Mall Shopping Center Parking Lot - 1516 Hudson St., Longview, WA

**Vancouver – Monday, August 25, 10:00am - 11:00am**  
Vancouver Mall Parking Lot - 8700 N.E. Vancouver Mall Dr., Vancouver, WA

**Portland – Monday, August 25, 1:00pm - 2:00pm**  
OHSU South Waterfront - 3303 S.W. Bond Ave., Portland, OR

If one person can battle cancer, a nation can rise up and defeat it. Come join us and find out how you can help!



**YOUR VOICE CAN FIGHT CANCER**