

The Three Little Sheep: A Healing Story Redux

by Sheila Wee

Every now and then storytellers may be asked to come up with a tale to address a very specific medical issue. In 2003, I was asked by the Singapore Health Promotion Board to create a story about asthma to perform at a Polyclinic (community health clinic) event for World Asthma Day. The story was to be an accessible vehicle for passing on knowledge of asthma triggers and asthma management to an audience made up of both low-income families with asthmatic children and government officials.

*With this sort of commission, I may spend a great deal of time trying to create a story to hang the information on. This time I was lucky. I remembered my copy of the book *The Healing Heart: Families*, edited by Allison Cox and David Albert, and there it was—“*The Three Little Pigs of Hog Holler Swamp*” by Allison Cox—a story about asthma and allergies. Although Allison’s story was very American in its language and details, it gave me the structure I was looking for. I used this story, with Allison’s permission, to create a tale that would reflect Singapore culture. For example, in my story the *Three Little Pigs* morphed into *Three Little Sheep* out of respect for the sensibilities of the Muslims in the audience.*

They also returned home to live with Mama at the end of the story, reflecting the traditional norm of several generations living together under one roof.

The performance of the story was a success and much of the credit must go to Allison Cox for sharing her story. This experience taught me that it is not always necessary to reinvent the wheel. When time is short we can tap into some of our tried and true tales to create something new that meets our needs.

I have a story
A story for you
A story bold
A story true
So let’s open the book
and take a peep
at the story of the Three Little Sheep

There were once Three Little Sheep named Wheeza, Snuffle and Gasper. They lived with their mother in a little house on the side of a hill. They lived very happily together.

They liked their house and they loved each other, but there was a problem.

You see, the Three Little Sheep weren’t very little any more. They were quite big. They were quite big enough to go out and get a job. That wasn’t the problem. The problem was that they were too lazy to look for a job

Mama Sheep went out to work every day. She worked hard all day and came home each evening to cook delicious grass stew for her three little sheep. She was so busy working and cooking that she had no time to clean the house. She had no time to vacuum the rugs. No time to wash the curtains. Sometimes she was so busy she even forgot to wash the bed sheets.

This was a big problem!

You see Wheeza, Snuffle and Gasper all suffered from asthma, and their dusty house made them wheeze, snuffle and gasp! All day long they were wheezing and coughing, wheezing and coughing. They were far too lazy to do any of the work themselves, but not too lazy to complain.

“Muuuum! Don’t you know that you need to keep the rugs and curtains clean and free from dust mites?”

“Muuuum! Don’t you know you must wash our bed sheets in hot water every week?”

“Muuuum! Muuuum! Muuuum!”

They complained and complained and complained.

Mama Sheep tried her best; she got up early; she went to bed late. She worked and she worked and she worked. Until one day, she stopped working. She stood very still – thinking.

Then she turned to her three children and said, “How old are you now?”

“Oh quite old,” they said.

“Are you grown up sheep yet?”

“Oh quite grown up,” they said.

“Then,” she said with a smile, “I think it’s time I retired! I think it’s time you started doing some of the work around here! I’m going to take up gardening; I’m going to go to line dancing classes with Mrs. Goat and cookery classes with Mrs. Duck. I’ll still cook your dinner every night, but you must clean the house yourselves.”

Now as I said, those three little sheep were a little bit lazy; they didn’t like the sound of all that work.

It sounded dull.

It sounded boring.

They’d much rather Go exploring.

So they said to their mother,

“Mama dear, we love you so,
But now it’s time for us to go.
Now that all of us are grown,
We must look for a house of our own.”

Mama Sheep knew that there was no point arguing. So she packed their asthma medication, reminded them to scrub their hooves and brush their wool; kissed each of them on their woolly cheeks and waved them goodbye.

Wheeza, Snuffle and Gasper trotted happily down the road. The sun was shining, the sky was blue. They breathed in the clean fresh air. Ahhhh, that felt good! Not a trace of a wheeze.

Then Gasper started jumping up and down with excitement. “A house, a house, I see a house!,

“Let’s look,” said Wheeza.

The three little sheep looked at the house. It stood in the middle of a grassy field.
It was not too big and not too small.
It was not too short and not too tall.
It was made of hay, It was made of straw.
The prettiest house you ever saw.

The Three Little Sheep moved right in. They liked their new house. They snuggled down to sleep that night with smiles on their sleepy sheepy faces.

But in the middle of the night, Wheeza wheezed, Snuffle snuffled, and Gasper gasped.

They opened their eyes and reached for their puffs. (Two deep breaths)

Something was setting off their asthma. What was it?

Suddenly Snuffle stopped snuffling and started sniffing. "Sniff, sniff, sniff. Wolf! I smell wolf!"

The three little sheep peered out between the stalks of straw and hay. In the darkness, they saw two glowing eyes, two pointy ears, and a mouth full of sharp, sharp teeth.

"Oooohh!" breathed Gasper, "There's something about a wolf fur coat, that really tightens up my throat."

"For asthma you can use your puff, watch out for those teeth you silly duff," whispered Snuffle.

Then a great gruff voice came thundering through the walls, "Little sheep, little sheep, let me in please."

The Three Little Sheep looked at each other, then yelled back in chorus, "Not by the wool on our shivering knees!"

"Then I'll huff and I'll huff and I'll puff till I make you all wheeze!"

Then the Big Bad Wolf lit up a cigarette and began blowing the smoke into the house.

The three little sheep began coughing and wheezing, coughing and wheezing.
They coughed and they wheezed as they broke down the back wall.
They coughed and they wheezed as they ran through the dark field.

They didn't stop coughing and wheezing until they were safely hidden in a hollow tree in the middle of the woods, and had taken their puffs— which of course they always carried with them.

Early the next morning three stiff and grumpy little sheep climbed out of the hollow tree and set out to look for another, better house. They walked and walked all day. Then, just as the sun was setting, they saw it. On the bank of the river was a lovely little house all made of sticks.

Three little sheepy faces peeped into the window. It seemed to be empty; no one seemed to be living there. Three sheepy faces smiled at each other. In three shakes of a lamb's tail, they were inside the house and lined up on the floor ready for bed.

The three sleepy sheep were soon fast asleep and snoring, "Snort baaah, snort baaah snort baaah."

But did they get to sleep in peace? Oh no!
For at just about three o'clock in the morning, along comes who? The Big Bad Wolf!

That's right, it was that big, old, mean, old, wolf walking along the riverbank and puffing on a nasty smelly cigarette.

When the wolf saw the little stick house, he stopped, he looked, he sniffed.

"I smell lamb, I smell sheep
Up to that house I'll creep, creep, creep.
I'll huff and I'll puff With my smelly old smoke
I'll huff and I'll puff, till I make them all choke."

So that mean old wolf crept up to the house and started blowing cigarette smoke through the gaps in the sticks. The smoke circled above the heads of the three sleeping sheep. It curled around their ears and slipped up their noses.

The sheep awoke with a cough and a choke.
Their chests were all wheezy,
Their noses all sneezy.

They looked at each other,
They knew what it was;
The Big Bad Wolf with his hungry jaws.

What were they to do? They couldn't break down the walls,

The sticks were too strong. The only way out was through the door. And outside the door was the wolf!

"Little sheep, little sheep, let me in please!" boomed the wolf.

"No! Not by the wool on our shivering knees," chorused the three little sheep.

"Then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll smoke you all out!"

And the wolf blew a huge cloud of smoke through the keyhole.

The sheep reached for their puffs (two deep breaths)

But two puffs were not enough. They were still wheezing.

They took some more medication.

(two deep breaths)

"It's no good," said Wheeza. "We need to get to the hospital. We need the nebulizer!"

"But we'll never get past the wolf," wailed Snuffle.

"He'll eat us up" whimpered Gasper.

Just at that moment, they heard a coughing and a spluttering from the other side of the door.

“Cough, cough, cough.”

All that nasty cigarette smoke had its effect on the wolf's health, and he was coughing his lungs up.

“Quick, now's our chance,” said Wheeza.

And those three little sheep came bursting through the door, past the wolf. They jumped into the river and paddled across.

Splish splash, splish splash, splish splash.

The wolf came after them.

Splish splash cough, splish splash cough, splish splash cough,

The three little sheep reached the road and trotted along as fast as their little legs could carry them.

Trit trot, trit trot, trit trot.

Behind them came the wolf, galumphing and coughing along.

The Three Little Sheep arrived at the hospital with the wolf right behind them.

They all crashed through the doors and collapsed in a shivering, wheezing, sneezing, coughing heap.

Half an hour later—

The Wolf was sitting in the doctor's office. The doctor gave him some cough medicine.

“I think I'll give up smoking,” said the Wolf, “and I'll definitely give up chasing sheep. Maybe I should go after some other sort of animal...”

Meanwhile, along the corridor,
Three wet and shivery little sheep
Sat in a row breathing deep.

The nebulizer saved the day,
But in the hospital they had to stay.

The doctor telephoned their mama,
Who came and brought them clean pyjamas.

“Oh Mama, Oh Mama, Oh Mama” they cried,
“We're sorry we ever left your side.
We want to come home to our house on the hill.
We promise we'll clean, we promise we will.
No dust will lurk in rug or curtain.
We'll all work hard, of that we're certain.”

And so the Three Little Sheep went home, promising never again to roam.

They kept their house tidy, they kept their house clean.

Their asthma got better, they were lazy no more,

They swept all the dust out from their door.

And so, my story is almost over,

The sheep and their mama are living in clover,

Their asthma's controlled...

And my story is told.

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