

SSPP OPTIONAL CREATIVE PROJECTS 5/12

Dear [REDACTED], it was a privilege to participate in your SSPP creative projects session. Your poem was beautiful, indeed a fitting note on which to end. I've also read Kundera's *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and I loved the way you integrated this image into the description of your senior partner. You had such an interesting perspective that, unlike the stereotype of older age burdening its possessors, it may in fact have a liberating component. Terrific! Your poem also demonstrated evidence of close observation of your partner, both outside and in. You had developed that most precious of understandings, "personal knowledge" of who this individual is. Finally, the way you integrated rhymes and near-rhymes into your lines for me added a poignant, elegiac quality. Lovely writing that conveyed sensitivity to and appreciation of this person. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear [REDACTED], thank you for the opportunity to participate in your SSPP creative projects session. Your essay about Mr. Picker was a joy to listen to and a pleasure to read. You conveyed so much about this man, both through what you observed during his patient care visit, and in the phrases with which you presented him ("a grand presence,"; "a student of the world"). Your essay offers us a slice of his life, and tells a story. I was impressed that you realized that Mr. Picker's priority for the visit was to talk about *his wife's* situation. I also deeply appreciated the insights you showed about the complex relationship between Mr. Picker and his wife. His love and appreciation for his companion of 60 years was evident; as was his exhaustion and concern. Caregiving is a challenging role. In medicine, too often we forget that attached to a given patient is a large circle of family and friends, each of whom is differentially affected by the illness of the sick person. Obviously, it is the caregiver who bears the weight of daily responsibility in the presence of chronic and life-threatening illness. If you can remember that, outside the exam room, these dramas are playing out daily, it will vastly improve the care you offer to your patients. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], very nice work on your collage. It captured the many interests and essence of your senior partner – the travel, the books, the bird-watching, gardening, exercise classes. You also caught something of her spirit – tough, smart, living by a motto of no regrets. I thought it was wonderful that you actually accompanied your partner to some of her favorite activities, in this way participating in her world. I found it especially thoughtful that you turned the collage into a beautiful present that I'm sure your partner will cherish. Thank you for your presentation, Dr. Shapiro

Hi [REDACTED], it was so nice to see you again and to discover you are surviving first year so well 😊.

What a fantastically creative idea to have your grandma write a poem about old age! I hope when you are a bona fide physician, you will occasionally consider asking a patient to write a poem or draw a picture of their illnesses, or what they are struggling with – or celebrating! – in their lives.

As far as your grandma's poem is concerned, I know this is something you will cherish. It is funny (and really well-written too, if I may be so bold), honest, poignant, and celebratory. I was especially struck by her willingness to share the challenges of old age – pain, fatigue, the aging uncooperative body – as well as by the way she "chose" to embrace her life now. I hope she *does* start a movement! She shared so much of what it is like – for her – to grow old with you, and you were generous enough to share her wisdom with your classmates. What a gift! Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], great presentation about your senior partner. Your photo really seems to capture the essence of this man – energetic, healthy, engaged, passionate about his work! Yet, as you discovered, this is only one facet. Your partner still has a vibrant work life, but at home he struggles with an ill and disabled wife toward whom he has feelings of both loyalty/love and frustration. I was impressed by the rich and complex “portrait” you presented. One of the easiest pitfalls of clinical practice is to think we “know” someone because of the “face” they present to us. Often it’s important to dig deeper, as you two obviously did. You really made the most of this project. Thank you for the opportunity to sit in.
Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], thank you for sharing such a touching picture of you with your senior partner. It conveys a bond of affection and appreciation. Nilasha, I thought the poem you chose showed real sensitivity and insight, especially because it was not immediately obvious why it was a good fit. But as you discussed your partner and his “grievances,” what emerged was someone struggling with exactly the theme of the poem – being alone, ignored, not seen, not heard, and not taken seriously. As you no doubt know, this is a common complaint of older patients (and people!). Like anyone, they seek acknowledgment and respect. Often, as they lose other connections, it is their physicians who are a potential source of such validation. I felt that, perhaps for your partner, you were those individuals who looked and listened, and recognized how much he had to give. Great work! Dr. Shapiro

Dear [REDACTED], thank you for the opportunity to read over your beautiful poem. I felt privileged to share it. You showed yourself to be deeply open to learning on so many levels from the relationship with your senior partners. It was also clear from your writing how much respect, even veneration you directed toward them, which I’m sure was very much appreciated. It was moving to me to see how you drew inspiration for your nascent relationship from the long-enduring bond between these two people. And on another note, if you don’t mind my saying so, I am enough of a romantic to believe that, indeed, love transcends time and space. Wishing you all the best, Dr. Shapiro

Hi [REDACTED], as always a pleasure to cross paths with you. Thanks for your many insightful comments at the SSPP session – you bring a wealth of awareness and experience to these sessions. Your photograph perfectly captured what your quote intimated – there can be beauty at every stage of life. It’s not the entirety of the experience – at any stage – but it is important to pause and value such moments, whether literal or metaphorical. Thanks for a lovely conceptualization that embodied the grace available toward the end of life. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Hi [REDACTED], wow, tackling Vivaldi’s Autumn in a med ed auditorium has got to be a first! Thanks so much for starting us off on the right note ☺. Four Seasons happens to be one of my favorite Vivaldi compositions, and as I listened to those sweet and passionate melodies emerging, I thought how much music conveys that mere words cannot. To me, moving beyond written and visual representations to pure listening (such a crucial skill in doctoring) was a wonderful way to help us pay more attention and listen more deeply to your playing and to the presentations that followed. A very thoughtful selection which, in my view, actually challenges stereotypes of the “autumn of one’s life” as necessarily melancholic and decaying. Thank you! Dr. Shapiro

Wow, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], that was a brilliant project! Your video skit was extremely well-written, hilarious and also completely on point (plus my admiration for your manipulation of the necessary technologies to produce this knows no bounds!). The opening section on stereotypes was very effective. I appreciated that you skewered not only the stereotypes that abound about older persons, but also the stereotypes of younger persons (including physicians) who don’t take them seriously, are irritated by

their stories and preoccupations, are not interested in listening or paying attention to their problems, and who find them annoyingly out of touch and irrelevant. The interview segments were a powerful contradiction of these views and demonstrated a vibrant older man and his wife who were very much engaged in life. I was especially touched that the inspiration for the project was your senior partner, himself an accomplished actor. Your video was a marvelous tribute. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear [REDACTED], what an inspired idea to make a video of your grandparents. They obviously have a wonderful relationship, still playful, sassy, and deeply loving after so many years together. It was evident that you have a close and loving relationship with your grandfather. He has given you a very important lesson – happiness in part is a function of circumstance; but more importantly it is a choice. As you proceed through the stresses and trials of medical training, I hope you remember your grandpa's example – you can choose happiness, a cheerful demeanor even in the face of significant external demands and pressures. You are lucky to have such an inspiring role model. Thanks for sharing them with us. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Hi [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. What a creative project – a collage in the shape of a boat! You did a wonderful job of representing your senior partner's interests and activities – the things that gave his life meaning. I'm glad that you uncovered his financial worries. As older people live longer, this can be a terrible problem that significantly affects quality of life. I also thought you addressed the issue of pipe-smoking with great sensitivity and insight. Patients can have different priorities than their physicians. Sometimes this is a result of misunderstanding or lack of education, in which case the two views can easily be brought into line. However, sometimes differences emerge from deeply held values and it is harder to find a meeting of the minds. The responsibility of the physician is to stay connected with the patient, so if/when the patient is ready and motivated to make changes, the physician is ready and motivated to help. Excellent work, which will also make a much appreciated gift. Best, Dr. Shapiro