

## LITMED SELECTIVE PROJECT FEEDBACK, 2007

Thanks very much for your extra make-up assignment. I agree with you about the power of Abse's poem. I've often wondered how, so close to the atrocities of the Holocaust, he was able to take morally right action toward this patient. I would like to think that, although Abse himself felt some guilt and a sense of betraying his heritage, in fact he was acting within the framework of the highest Jewish values. I wish you much luck with your future patients, difficult and not-so-difficult; and hope Abse's poem will remain in your mind as a little lamp.

I really liked your poem. It took a very concrete image – the simplicity of playing doctor as a child – and built upon it to reflect the dawning complexities of real-life medicine. Sadly, too often we still think in Cartesian terms of sick and well, although increasingly patients end up falling somewhere in the middle, with all the ambiguity and confusion (for both doctor and patient) that entails. I predict that it will get more complicated still (oh, darn!); but that's okay because life is pretty complicated too, and we all muddle through it. I enjoyed having you in class,. Have a good summer and I hope to see you occasionally next year. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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What a fantastic project! It was really, really good because it operates on so many different levels. The whole conceit of “seeing” the patient through “new” glasses was amazing, and the visual portrayal supported this insight perfectly. (There is actually a large medical sociology literature on something called the “clinical gaze” [based on the work of Michel Foucault] which basically explores “how” physicians “regard” the patient and the effects of this regard on both patients and themselves). The sketch and accompanying poem also raise the issue of what's been called “foreknowledge,” the idea that physicians often know more, and know earlier, things about the patient that the patient does not yet know or understand. This can truly be a heavy burden. In your reference to “juice and gin” (which I realize was making your rhyme scheme), you also allude to physician coping; and how rates of alcoholism (and drug use) are higher in physicians than in the general population. With such insight, I believe you will find many opportunities to “embrace [your] newfound vision;” and develop the strength to use your gaze, your special knowledge for healing. This was really impressive! Great job. All the best over the summer and next year, Dr. Shapiro

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You guys were really funny, and did a great job on your skit. Amidst all the laughter, you successfully addressed a crucial issue for all medical students. Yes, it is true that everyone has their own style; and it is also true that sometimes we can learn from each other's strengths (some people need to study a little harder; and some people need to get a life). But I think the overall message was one of perspective (i.e., both students were getting similar grades). As you suggested, make sure you somehow have a life as a context into which to place medical school. It is so easy for this training to *become* your life; but even though it is important and, often all-consuming, there is still a difference. Paradoxically, I believe it is by staying in touch with your “ordinary life” that you will become a truly excellent physician on all dimensions. Thanks for helping us to end on a

light, but important, note. I hope you both have a wonderful summer, and I will keep my eyes open for you next year. Best, Dr. Shapiro

I wanted you to know how much I appreciated the session you led; as well as your many insightful and perceptive in-class comments. It was a real pleasure to have you as part of this class.

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Thanks for your meditation on the tensor fascia lata. I hope this poem cemented some of these complicated terms and actions in your brain! You are so right that, although anatomy is challenging, it is a rare kind of privilege as well.

I enjoyed your presence in class. Although I'm not sure this was your first choice for a selective ☺, I appreciated the session you led, and the way in which your participation and comments steadily grew in depth over the course of our sessions. Good luck finishing up the year. Have a great summer, and I hope to see you next year. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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I smiled at your little poetic story (or narrative poem?). Your use of image and detail made entirely vivid the experience in your mom's clinic. What I'm wondering is, though, are you trying to *avoid* your karma by trying to escape the screaming little trouble-makers in your future that were you in your past? ☺ (I probably don't have a very good understanding of karma ☺).

it was such a joy to have you in this class. You emerged as a real leader, always engaged, always ready with a thoughtful response or superb insight. You were a wonderful role-model for other students about how to learn from this material. Yet you were also very skillful in building on their comments and stimulating group participation. Your intellectual well-roundedness, your perceptiveness and sensitivity I am sure will combine in the future to make you an outstanding physician. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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your project was excellent. I really liked the way you combined two different art forms – poetry and documentary film – to get at the heart of how complicated communication across culture (both medical/lay cultures and American/Afghani cultures) can be. It's great you were able to see "Hold Your Breath." I've read many accolades about this film, but somehow have never been able to view it, so it was especially valuable to me to hear your reactions. One thing learned from the film, and which you were able to convey to the rest of us, is that it is a lot more difficult to be "cross-culturally sensitive" than most of us think. This doctor's heart was obviously in the right place, yet truly egregious communication mistakes occurred. I also was glad you were able to extract a "learning lesson" from this sad event. I agree with your conclusion that communication is a lot more about listening than it is about telling.

it was a real delight to have you in class. I very much valued your perspective and your reliable involvement at each session. Your contributions to our discussions were always well-chosen and reflective of the deeper meanings in the works we read. I was really impressed that you even asked for extra reading! Please keep in touch next year and let me know how you're doing. All the best, Dr. Shapiro

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What a neat poem. Of course (well, at least in my reading, “of course”!), the carpenter metaphor also has intimations of that most famous carpenter, Jesus; and to me this suggests the spiritual dimension of medical practice. In addition, the metaphor is an excellent one through which to explore thoughts about building and destroying, the latter of which often seems to prevail as a result of the anatomy experience. Yet it is simultaneously true, as your poem says, that you are “building” a powerful foundation of knowledge upon which to erect a solid edifice of patient care (see, I can work within a metaphor too ☺). I also liked the way the narrator was able to “return” by the end of the poem to the humanity, the story of the cadaver, and to acknowledge that ‘she was more than what I had made it to be.’ That is a lovely line.

I was very glad to have you in class, Allen, and enjoyed your comments. Have a great summer, and I hope to see you around next year. Best, Dr. Shapiro