

OUTLINE – PERSONAL SHARING EVENING

I. Introduction

Randy thought this session would save him a long boring introduction

I thought it might be just slightly self-indulgent

But fortunately (I think) for all you ^{present} future doctors, my family has had lots of diseases, And I like to write poems about them.

Also, my family is a good case example of how disease extends its reach across generations;

and I think this aspect might be particularly pertinent to rural practice, where families stay put a bit more than in the city, and a country doc may well develop, and make use of, the sort of personal knowledge I'm about to entrust you with

So for the next hour, pretend you are my doctors, and you are listening to my very particularistic, personal stories of sickness

II. Looking Backwards Two Generations: Grandparents

A. Maternal grandfather –

1. A high status, highly paid Chicago surgeon who, my mother explained to me when I was a kid, “only operated on the stomach”

2. When he was about 65, and I was about 10, he “retired” to the Ozarks, where he lived in a little town called Forsythe Missouri

3. He became a country doc

4. I didn't see much of him since we lived in California, but here is one memory (“Driving with My Grandpa”)

B. Maternal grandmother –

1. My grandmother and grandfather were divorced

2. My grandmother only lived about 20 minutes away, but we didn't see much of her either

3. She was a beautiful woman, even when I knew her, and a florid alcoholic

4. She died when I was eight, technically of a stroke but at the time she was also busy dying of breast cancer and alcoholism (“Drowning” poem)

C. Paternal great-grandfather and grandfather

→ 1. My mother's folk came to America during the Irish potato famine

2. My dad's grandfather was part of a failed revolution in Rumania in the 1890s, and fled for his life to America

Now I'm a 3. When he reached Ellis Island, they asked him what his name was. He replied “Yankee. At last I'm a freed man.” So he became Yankee Freedman

4. He was a Jew, a socialist, an atheist, and a gambler. He died at 45 of a massive heart attack. His father had also died young from the same disease.

5. My paternal grandfather, Yankee's son, was by all accounts a brilliant, sensitive, chess-playing comedy writer for Jewish vaudeville. He married at 18, fathered four children, of whom my own father was the eldest, and died at 38... of a massive MI (“The Gambler”). My father was 18 years old.

III. Looking Backwards One Generation: Parents

A. My grandfather's death had a huge impact on his family

1. His wife, my grandmother, built a shrine to him in her heart, like Queen Victoria did for her beloved Albert, and never remarried *although she had to be 89*
2. One son became a cardiologist
3. One son renounced Judaism, and became a Christian minister
4. My father became a surrogate father to the family, dropping out of college and giving up his dream of becoming a mathematician. The New York comedy writers took him under their wing, and trained him to write so as to make people laugh. He wrote for radio, then when it was invented for television, for 25 years, until he went back to school, got his B.A., then his Ph.D. in mathematics, and taught college for another 25 years
5. At 75, the family history caught up with him, and he underwent bypass surgery ("After Sextuple Bypass Surgery")
6. But long before all that happened, when he was only 21, and the country was on the verge of World War II, my father married my mother.
7. My mother, the oldest daughter of the doctor and the beautiful alcoholic, had a heart so damaged by rheumatic fever that she was supposed to die before her 21st birthday. She married my father 3 months before she turned 21.

V. Family of Origin

A. My mother wasn't supposed to have children, because of her heart, but eventually she ~~got tired of playing it safe and~~ had three, of whom I was the eldest, *children* because her husband/~~my father's~~ *cardiologist* brother, a first year intern at the time, told her she would probably survive a pregnancy once she could walk up two flights of stairs without pausing for breath. She practiced daily until she accomplished this goal, and then got pregnant. My uncle almost fainted when he heard the news, and confided to my father that there was no real medical basis for his advice. Nevertheless it proved sound. *This was on the advice of medicine who*

B. When I was 6 months old, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was told she couldn't have more children, unless they removed both breasts, so at the age of 29 she had a double radical mastectomy. ("The Mother with No Breasts")

C. When he was ~~two~~, and I was ~~6~~, my brother developed rheumatic fever ("Atlas Shrugged"). And if anyone here is interested in psychoanalyzing my personality, this poem will give them a big leg up.

D. When she was 13, my little sister was diagnosed with severe scoliosis.

E. When he was 18, my brother was diagnosed with ankylosing spondulitis

IV. Fast Forward: Kids

A. Shauna – now an assistant professor of health psychology

1. At 13, she was diagnosed with severe scoliosis ("The Snake")
2. At 17, she had a five hour surgery which placed a steel rod in her spine
3. She now runs mini-marathons and is a student of yoga

B. Josh – now graduating from college

1. At 14, he was diagnosed with juvenile ankylosing spondulitis ("Going to Alaska")
2. At 17, he became severely depressed ("Suicidal Son")

3. My husband's mother also suffered from major depression and had made several suicide attempts while my husband was an adolescent.

V. Grandchildren

- A. In 2000, our pregnant daughter developed severe toxemia, and our first grandchild was born six weeks premature
- B. I spend a good deal of my time being rather hard on physicians, but underneath I really like them, and I realized just how much I like them when one of them saved my daughter's life ("I Am Grateful").

VI. And What About Me?

- A. I try to avoid illness by writing about the illnesses of others
- B. This strategy is only partially successful and like many other 55 year olds, I have my share of health problems... about which I also write.
- C. I'd like to end this session with a poem that describes – with a little humor I hope – that anathema of all family doctors, the patient with LBP
- D. I admit it, I confess, you have one in your midst!