

IM

Q001

Shapiro, Johanna

To:



Subject:

thank-you

I didn't forget the M.D. rapper. I wish I'd been able to see the lyrics, but what I remember was funny and perceptive. It was a highly original and imaginative contribution, and it seemed as though you were enjoying yourself in its performance, as your audience certainly was in listening! I hope you continue to find creative outlets to occasionally help you reflect on your experiences as a physician. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: thank you

I really liked your poem, [REDACTED] (a abab rhyme scheme yet!). I liked its progression from annoyance and frustration to appreciation; and in its tone, from humor to compassion. Probably only another medical student can really understand just how hard it is to be awakened repeatedly to take care of people who are nasty to you, or the guilt that can ensue by giving them a medication to keep them quiet for awhile. But by listening to you "talk" through your poem about this experience, I think I understood it a bit better. Thanks for sharing, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To:

[REDACTED]

Subject:

way to go

Thanks for the very nice power-point presentation. Two birds with one stone - you satisfied your humanities requirement, and are now a high-tech wizard! I thought that was a wonderful question you asked your classmates (and they gave wonderful answers - funny, sarcastic, but often heartfelt). I wasn't able to make this point clearly during our discussion, but it seemed to me you and [REDACTED] were wrestling (from different perspectives) with what it means to become a doctor - what is lost and what is gained by entering this elite kingdom. P.S. Glad to see that little doggie has dreams of his own! Good luck next year, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: thanks!

I'm glad you turned in a copy of your haiku. They're really good, and reading them over (as opposed to merely listening to them) gave me a chance to look at them more reflectively. It's interesting how the "discipline" of a particular form can sometimes push us to use language differently, and carefully craft ideas that we would otherwise just blurt out. Here is the Basho poem I mentioned (it will probably not be predictive of your residency - at least I hope not!). By the way, I like that quote. Who is Bill Higginson - the author of a book on haiku? Thanks again for your work. Dr. Shapiro

*Bitten by fleas and lice
I slept in a bed
A horse urinating all the time
Close to my pillow
- Basho (1644-94)*

Shapiro, Johanna

To:

[REDACTED]

Subject:

thank you

Hi [REDACTED] Thanks for the memorable abbreviation SSDD - I'm sure it will come in handy :-). You put into forceful language the frustration many doctors feel when confronted with patients with chronic disease who do not seem to care. This poem raises some really wonderful questions: why are people "noncompliant"?; what does it mean "not to care"?; what kind of help can we really give patients?; and what do we do to manage and contain our own feelings of frustration toward patients whom apparently we can neither cure nor control? I'm sorry we weren't able to explore these issues more fully yesterday, but even by asking the questions you suggest at some level you are seeking out answers. Good luck with your search! Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: thank you

Hi [REDACTED] It was very nice to see you again. What a lovely poem you created - thanks for putting in the effort. What an incredible range of experience and emotion you all undergo as students -- a magnificent, exhausting, joyous, depressing, humbling spectrum. It must be overwhelming at times... but also, at least in my eyes, at times a privilege. As a physician, you get to live close to the core of what it means to be human (when you're not filling out paperwork, that is). It's a challenge, but also an incredible gift. Thank you for capturing it so well in your writing. Good luck next year.
Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: thank you

Hi [REDACTED] Sorry you couldn't join us yesterday, but thank you for your great story. I love these moments of transformation, when how we see others - and ourselves - suddenly, and unexpectedly, make a remarkable shift. It is an incredible occurrence, a real gift in a way, but if you are open to the possibility, it can happen again and again in your life, and each time it makes your life richer and more compassionate. In response to your final query, I think it's pretty natural that you originally felt "spite" toward this cantankerous old gentleman. Maybe the real lesson to be learned is not "Don't ever feel frustration toward difficult patients" - because you will, but more along the lines of, "Always let yourself be surprised by life!" Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: thank you

I got a lot out of your writing, [REDACTED]. As I mentioned yesterday, I thought it took great courage first to put this down on paper; and secondly, to read it out loud. Not only was it courageous, but it is really strong writing - satiric, open, painful. You had something powerful to say, and you said it without pulling any punches. It is apparent from your writing that you have really "claimed" who you are, something many of us struggle with for a long time. But having "no regrets" is a good way to live life. Thanks again for this work, Dr. Shapiro P.S. The book I mentioned is by Rafael Campo, *The Desire to Heal: A Doctor's Education in Empathy, Identity, and Poetry*. His books of poems include *What the Body Told*, and *The Other Man was Me*. You might really connect with what he is saying (then again you might not, but he too risks speaking in a transparent, genuine voice that keeps pushing the boundaries of what it means to be a doctor, to be a man, to be gay, to love, to engage, you name it). I'm sure you can get them through amazon.com or barnes&noble.com. I'd be happy to loan them to you if you're ever on campus. I'm very glad our paths crossed again, [REDACTED] and I wish you much success next year. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, June 01, 2001 1:25 PM
To: Shapiro, Johanna
Subject: RE: medicine clerkship

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

-----Original Message-----

From: Shapiro, Johanna
To: [REDACTED]
Sent: 6/1/2001 12:50 PM
Subject: medicine clerkship

[REDACTED] I really appreciated your honest grappling with that most difficult of questions - as health care professionals, can we ever truly "know" another human being, and should we even bother trying. It's Osler's famous distinction between treating the disease vs. treating the person with the disease. Despite all the limitations and inadequacies you correctly identify, for my part, I just don't think we can effectively treat the disease without some "personal knowledge" of the patient. Certainly not a chronic and complex disease such as schizophrenia. So in my mind we are left pursuing imperfect, but hopefully "good enough" patient-centered solutions. Still, people are different, and by focusing on "medical attention," you may actually end up giving your patients more of what they want. What your essay does show is that, should you choose to explore more intimate connections with patients, you have the sensitivity and compassion to do so.
Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [redacted]
Subject: RE: Why not ME?

Hi Rajeev. Oh dear, I am so sorry, because I really loved your satires (kindly meant! I'm sure), as well as your poem. They showed me you have a keen eye, a critical mind... and a caring heart. I also greatly appreciated the honesty and thoughtfulness with which you participated in our group discussion. My only excuse (and not a very good one, I admit) for my lack of commentary is that because you did not turn in a written copy of your project, I thought you might not want further dialogue. My mistake, as I see from below, and I truly apologize.

Reading between the lines, I hope you did not conclude that in any way I felt offended by your remarks, or judged them to be inappropriate. On the contrary. In my mind, you used this session exactly as it was intended - to reflect on the process of becoming a physician, including reflecting on the system of education that facilitates (or impedes) this process. And you are quite right - it is a very imperfect system. I think the duty of all of us who participate in it is to acknowledge its flaws, and figure out what small piece we can contribute to making it a bit better. Clearly, in this regard, the responsibility of faculty is much greater than that of students. However, students play a critical role in keeping us honest - if they have the courage to do so, as you clearly have. So I think there is always an important place for critical judgment - tempered, of course, by compassion, for all of us as fallible, suffering human beings (surprise - this is true for faculty too).

Thank you very much for sharing just a bit of your personal journey, Rajeev. Family, faith, and culture are important anchors in our lives, and it is very painful to lose them or question them. But sometimes it is possible to use such tribulations to become a wiser, more caring person, and it seems to me this is what you are trying to do. I suspect that your unwillingness to turn a blind eye to the inequities, hypocrisies, and even brutalities of this system in part grows out of your understanding of what it means to suffer. I am glad that, despite your criticisms, you have chosen a "place" in medicine. Clearly, if you did not care so much about the profession, and what it can be potentially, you would not take the time to challenge and question.

I wish you much good luck next year. Please keep in touch if you'd ever like to chat about ideas large or small. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

P.S. It may be of some consolation that, although this reply was the very last, it was also the longest :-).

-----Original Message-----

From: [redacted]
Sent: Monday, June 04, 2001 1:20 PM
To: Shapiro, Johanna
Subject: Why not ME?

[redacted]

I was curious as to why I was the only...
I have witnessed deaths of my family...
I might furnish my character...

IM 2001

Shapiro, Johanna

From: Shapiro, Johanna
Sent: Friday, June 01, 2001 12:13 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: medicine clerkship

[REDACTED] thank you for your poem. It really made me laugh, but perhaps told important truths about your colleagues as well... and most importantly, about you. You are an astute observer of human nature! I hope you find the path that is *really* (not just superficially) right for you. Thank you also for your comments. Good luck next year, and don't forget I'm "out there" if there's anything I can do for you or your classmates. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To:

[REDACTED]

Subject:

medicine clerkship

[REDACTED], I really liked what you wrote for the clerkship. It initially seems simply a litany of the varied experiences of the third year student. Then, in that last couplet, you take a risk and go one step deeper. In doing so, you see what really will sustain you over time in the practice of medicine, even if you are headed for ortho (-:)). Good luck next year, and thanks again for this effort. Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: medicine clerkship

[REDACTED] thank-you for your three little "prayers." As I mentioned in our first session, I think we all, students, patients, faculty, need a prayer or two to help us get through the day. Yours were funny, and I think that's what made them so enjoyable. Yet they simultaneously spoke to important issues about surviving the struggles life sends us (even if they be checking sphinctor tone). Thanks for lightening my day. Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: medicine clerkship

Hi [REDACTED] I'm not surprised you've won some art competitions - you're very talented. I hope this creative outlet continues to be a source of relaxation and fulfillment, and allows you to express an alternative side. Good luck next year, and warm regards, Dr. S

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: medicine clerkship

[REDACTED] you wrote a wonderful poem about a code blue. For a non-physician like me (and perhaps for your physician colleagues as well), it really captures the desperate hope, madness, and futility of resuscitation efforts. I'm glad you carried this patient back to your dinner (or breakfast), and thought about him a little while longer. Clearly he had something to teach you - and all of us. Thanks for sharing, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: medicine clerkship

[REDACTED] I really appreciated your honest grappling with that most difficult of questions - as health care professionals, can we ever truly "know" another human being, and should we even bother trying. It's Osler's famous distinction between treating the disease vs. treating the *person* with the disease. Despite all the limitations and inadequacies you correctly identify, for my part, I just don't think we *can* effectively treat the disease without some "personal knowledge" of the patient. Certainly not a chronic and complex disease such as schizophrenia. So in my mind we are left pursuing imperfect, but hopefully "good enough" patient-centered solutions. Still, people are different, and by focusing on "medical attention," you may actually end up giving your patients more of what they want. What your essay does show is that, should you choose to explore more intimate connections with patients, you have the sensitivity and compassion to do so. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: medicine clerkship

[REDACTED] thank you so much for all the effort, care, and reflection you put into this assignment. The result was a very well-crafted, as well as moving and thought-provoking, allegory. There is actually a literary sub-genre called "mid-life fairytales" that addresses the reevaluation (and sometimes cynicism and despair) that normally occur in middle age. By writing about a mid-life third party, you were able to create some imaginative distance, and thus have the opportunity to explore what your own life might look like twenty years hence. The metaphor of physician as knight and dragon-slayer is very compelling in its idealism. I think it's a component many of us long to reinstate in contemporary views of what it means to be a physician. You tell a cautionary tale of disappointment and betrayal wisely and well. I can only hope that your own story will have a happier, more fulfilled ending. Thank you again for this work. Dr. Shapiro

IM 2001

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Rucker, Lloyd
Subject: clinical humanities project

Thank you for sharing your moving tribute to your former classmate. I liked the way the lyrics alternated between your perspective and that of your suffering friend (prescient pov writing!). But, at least for me, it was the music that animated the words and imbued them with power. As I experienced your tape (and of course everyone brings something different to the act of listening), the music was both celebratory and rageful - kind of high velocity music that contradicted and challenged death. Anyway, I enjoyed it on a visceral level, as well as appreciated the act of taking tragedy and trying to turn it to good. Thanks again, and good luck next year. Dr. Shapiro

P.S. Jason, could you please let the other members of your small group know that if they'd like to send me copies of their projects, I'd be glad to comment. I only received stuff from you, [REDACTED] Thanks :-)

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Rucker, Lloyd
Subject: clinical humanities project

Hi [REDACTED] Thank you for the insightful and thought-provoking analysis of the Cairo photograph. You had some important things to say about different approaches to healing. I will always remember your conclusion that "cars go from one place to another, but carts can get you there too." You also made a good point about the assumptions we make about people based on superficial characteristics of race, ethnicity, gender, country of origin, attire etc. I think we all want to be seen as individual human beings, even if we are firmly rooted within the context of culture. Thank you also for your encouraging comments about humanities. It's nice to know that sometimes this kind of teaching occasionally falls on fertile soil. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Rucker, Lloyd
Subject: clinical humanities project

[REDACTED] you wrote a powerful story. I especially liked the "confusion" you created initially in the reader, which of course mirrors the confusion that Julia increasingly feels. And, as I mentioned in class, that final image is remarkable - the two lying side by side, yet growing more distant moment by moment. You might want to look at a book Scar Tissue, by Michael Ignatieff about a mother descending into the lostness of Alzheimer's as recounted from her adult son's perspective. It has a similar feel of despair and obstinant courage as your own writing. Thanks for sharing, Regards, Dr. Shapiro

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Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: clinical humanities

Hi Heidi. It was so nice to see you again for these couple of sessions. I hope third year is going well for you. Your poem was wonderful in its rich detail, blunt language, and layers of irony - and compassion. I hope writing the poem helped you feel your way toward the patient a bit more deeply. Thank you very much for creating these powerful images, and for sharing them. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: clinical humanities

Hi [REDACTED] Thank you especially for participating so willingly and seriously in this exercise, since I know (and understand) your reservations about its value. It is a real act of courage to disclose something so obviously difficult and personal as your grandmother's death. I could see you were really moved as you talked, and yet you didn't quit, you just kept going. I really respect the emotion you felt and your ability to show it to all of us. Please accept my sincere condolences for her loss.

Haiku is a perfect form for you - not too wordy (-:-), and requiring significant discipline. Your final line lingers with me not only on a literal level (gee, this lady must have actually been somebody's grandma, which is an important thought in itself), but also because it asks more deeply whether, in some sense, she is not your grandma and everybody else's whose life she touched in her living and dying. Kind of makes all of us look at this patient differently, which of course is your point.

Thanks again for doing such heartfelt work. Dr. Shapiro

P.S. On a lighter note, I just received this haiku from a colleague last night. I pass it along - there are no coincidences!

Haiku, Gesundheit!
Haiku, Gedundheit again!
Please get a Kleenex

- Howard Stein, Ph.D. (he's a medical anthropologist who teaches in the family medicine residency at University of Oklahoma. You just never know where a haiku is going to emerge!).

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: clinical humanities

Nice work, [REDACTED] As you may or may not know, in the form you chose for your poem you are drawing on a great literary tradition that extends all the way back to the Bible (many of the psalms are written with each line starting with a letter than vertically then spells Rejoice or Hallelujah or Amen - in Hebrew of course). So perhaps that makes your final line referencing eternal life especially appropriate. Aside from the style, I also liked the way you wrestled with some frustrations/disappointments of your own with the choices (?) this patient made about his life. Perhaps Mr. C will have a second chance with a new kind of bottle! Thanks for sharing. Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To:

[REDACTED]

Subject:

clinical humanities

Hi [REDACTED] It was so nice to see you again for a couple of sessions. What a creative project! I really enjoyed it - I wanted to play with it! It was a wonderful idea to create a "world" out of the patient's bed, and then "fill" it with all the things that separate us from our patients, yet have the potential to bring us together. You demonstrated so ingeniously just how important perspective is. I think Dr. Amin is right - mount it on your office wall. It will be a reminder of all that matters in medicine. Thanks again, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: clinical humanities

Hi [REDACTED] Your poem takes me back to when you were a lowly first year, at times the only participant in the litmed elective. I'm very happy to have crossed paths again. You really have a talent for writing - the imagery of your poem is rich and beautiful. And, as often happens in creative writing, the poem escapes your conscious intent. Although you were careful to explain that this described your "initial" (and pretty negative) impressions of Mr. N, in fact the poem is filled with the empathy born of close and careful attention, the willingness to really get close to a not-so-lovable patient. Thank you for helping us to think about the "stereotypic alcoholic" in a much deeper way. Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: clinical humanities

[REDACTED] thank you for your poem about Mr. S. When I read it over, I appreciated the rhyme scheme a bit more. I read once in a book on writing poetry that the discipline of form is primarily useful because, while the conscious mind is focused on meter and rhyme, it allows the unconscious to express what we really want to but are afraid to put into language. Perhaps that was true in your case. In any event, you tackled a great issue - what do we do when there is no magic bullet, when the patient is falling apart right and left, and you patch, patch, patch, only to be confronted by rip, rip, rip. I wonder whether it was only the patient - or perhaps the doctor, too? - who in the end wanted more. This really made me think. Thanks again. Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: clinical humanities

Hi [REDACTED] I loved the central question of this poem - what is left when a patient is decimated by disease? The way you phrased your question forced all of us listening to challenge our assumptions about what constitutes a "whole" person. I could see many of your classmates who knew Mr. C nodding in agreement as your poem progressed. He sounds like a real model. It reminds how much about life we can learn from our patients - even as they confront death. Thanks very much for this work, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To: [REDACTED]
Subject: clinical humanities

Hi [REDACTED], I appreciated your poem because it reminded me that sometimes doing the right thing, and being a good person, is a lot simpler than we'd like to think. You made some excellent points about just how much support and reassurance medical students can give to patients by spending time with them and expressing interest in their lives. It is such a cliché, but everybody does have a story, and they are really worth listening to! Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Shapiro, Johanna

To:

[REDACTED]

Subject:

clinical humanities

[REDACTED] your essay was just incredible. I admire your courage in digging so deep to probe what the experience of a chronic illness or medical condition is all about. How honest you were about your grounding in the find-it-and-fix-it model. If only it were that simple. Also, your remarks about family histories of illness were very insightful. Like your husband, I also come from a family with lots of medical problems, and it makes all of us a little crazy! Knowing family dynamics around sickness can be a tremendous help to the physician, if only she takes the time to find out. Finally, it was wonderful to see the course of personal growth and transformation you charted. You clearly are a different - and if I may say - more sensitive and aware person as a result of this experience. Congratulations on doing such good work with such a difficult event. My best wishes that things will go smoothly for your husband from here on in... and for you in your pregnancy! You've got to let me know when the little cutie is born and whether it's a boy or girl. In the meantime, take good care of yourself, and enjoy the rest of your year. Regards, Dr. Shapiro