

---

Dear Songbirds, your performance was a parody with a sweetness and truth; and your montage did have an element of cheesy, but most of all a whiff of fondness and affection. I think you got it exactly right – at moments it was hell, but looking back over the past 4 years “you had the time of your life.” That is the right attitude with which to approach all of life – and such a good reminder to yourselves and your classmates as you move toward internship. As you said so well, it is always the people we remember – in your case, the friendships you’ve formed, the mentors you’ve met, the patients and families who were your teachers. You all were very funny (and surprisingly in tune!) yet found the serious heart of what these years have been all about. I hope we can all remember --’s mentors words: “How can I serve you?” The more you are able to carry these forward, they will be a trustworthy guide through the challenges and difficulties that lie ahead. Best, Dr. Shapiro

---

Dear A and B, what an interesting, thoughtful, and (in parts) funny project! --, you started us off with some well-selected cartoons illustrating the journey of the medical student – learning how to learn, the mountain of Step 1, the complete overwhelm of 3<sup>rd</sup> year (and all they didn’t teach you). Somehow from all of this, you teased out the privilege, compassion, purpose, professionalism, and inspiration that form the foundation of clinical medicine.

A, I loved your graph! There is a lot of faux science, “scientism,” out there, but your “data” struck me as very true. Your personal observations about empathy, as we discussed, are uncannily borne about in the actual research literature. Yet by exploring other dimensions, such as camaraderie, humility, clinical acumen, and the key construct of integration/personal growth, you complicated the model in an intriguing and I suspect more accurate way. What does it mean if empathy declines, but humility and integration increase? Is there a difference between “theoretical” and actual empathy? In essence, through a process of self-reflection, you mapped out a pretty exciting research agenda! I hope someone takes this on sometime.

Finally, B, your personal story about the patient whose fingers you and the team could not save, yet who showed only gratitude, was a powerful message about the role of the doctor. It was Hippocrates who said, “To cure sometimes, relieve often, and comfort always.” Sometimes modern physicians forget this latter injunction, but it is something always available to the healer, and what patients will always remember.

Thank you both, great work! Dr. Shapiro

---

Dear --, thank you for such a lovely project. I’m glad you chose to “fly solo.” It gave everyone in the room a chance perhaps to know you in a certain way. I know I for one appreciated learning something about your background; and it was interesting how many of your classmates also at one point in their lives could not have imagined becoming physicians. The parable of the man with no

shoes/no feet I have always been taught is an old Jewish proverb; but regardless of its origin, it is a potent reminder of gratitude no matter where we find ourselves in life. Thank you for telling an old story in new form.

How wonderful that you had a teacher in high school who cared so much about you and your classmates. There are moments in life when such faith from another can change the course of our lives. I know you will carry the message of “Dream Big” forward, for yourself and your fellow residents in this momentous time of transition; and for all your future patients who simply need someone to believe in them as your teacher believed in you. Best, Dr. Shapiro

---

Wow, this was a great project! I loved the focus on three points in time – past, present, and future. The “straight-to-camera” technique breaking the fourth wall was extremely effective. I am sure everyone in the room felt each of you was speaking directly to them. It became a privilege and intimacy to see a glimpse of who you were applying to medical school; who you are applying to residency; and who you hope to become (and hope your colleagues to be). It was such an interesting comment -- made about the process of sharing these statements with each other. I’m so glad you got to know each other from this perspective, and then offer these facets of yourselves to your classmates. As I mentioned in class, to use --’s term, I perceived a deepening integration and growth over the three time periods – the lovely naïve idealism of the medical school applicants, the confidence yet humility of the soon-to-be-residents committed to care of patients and service to communities, and the aspirations above all to be connected, devoted, empathic doctors able to connect to patients and families.

I think it was -- who said, happiness is changing lives; and you each have a great chance to touch and change so many lives. --, among others, dedicated herself to serving those who are marginalized and have no voice, and that is an obligation in some form for all who have the privilege of the power inherent in medicine. -- reminded us that illness and suffering do not stop when a patient is discharged; patients and their families return to complex lives that deserve our empathy and compassion. As -- noted, you will all make mistakes, but if you can meet your mistakes with humbleness that is how you will grow. -- talked about patient-centeredness, a core concept in clinical medicine. I would urge you to be not only patient-centered, but person-centered; as -- said, find your patients’ stories, and make every encounter meaningful. Wishing you all the best tomorrow and beyond! Dr. Shapiro

---

So impressed! This was an absolutely fantastic project. It did so much so creatively. The idea of working together to each create a slightly different version of the same picture was absolutely inspired. I was grateful you shared about the process of “co-creating” as a team – I was struck by many parallels to medicine. Each physician does her work slightly differently, yet big picture (sorry for the pun) it is the same beautiful, mysterious work of healing – just like your paintings!

The painting you chose was filled with wonderful symbolism – the boat, the sea, the darkness, the dawn. It was amazing how each of you took these elements and developed them in different and imaginative ways. --, I know little about painting, but I was fascinated by the way you used the different textures of paint to indicate that internal medicine is not a homogeneous practice. --, like the tides, you realized that there is much in medicine (and life!) that over which we have no power or control: thus we must look for the silver linings, the brightness in the dark. --, I loved your big boat as well as your recognition that we're all in the "same one". I was so struck by your story of the fellow who said, "I used to stop and think about my patients. When did I lose that?" The fact that this comment struck you suggests that you will never relinquish your capacity to think about your patients. --, your discourse on the metaphor of the boat – what keeps us afloat, what moves us forward, what prevents us from sinking, offered much food for thought. --, although I don't know the details of the difficulties that have touched your life, I was very moved by your city, the supportive network that helped you through. I also admired that you chose to explore "sailing into the night." Although you did not have time to paint in a lighthouse, that struck me as very appropriate – building that lighthouse is going to be an important task for you and all your classmates next year as residents, so that task still lies ahead. Finally, --, as a complete non-painter myself, I appreciated so much your meditation on the daunting aspects of taking brush in hand – yet you did it; and the parallels to the past challenge of medical school and the future challenge of residency could not have been more apropos. Your comment that you all have the tools was spot on. You may not feel it, but you are all so ready!

This was simply an amazing project. I really enjoyed it and learned a great deal from each of you.  
Best, Dr. Shapiro

---

Dear Team Storybook, what a completely charming format and story! The conceit of telling this story to your children and grandchildren was sweet and clever. The mini-reenactments were adorable and really brought the story to life. You covered all the key moments – the joy of acceptance to med school; the proud parents at the white coat ceremony; Monday Fundays and anatomy; conquering the monster of Step 1; the ups and downs of third year; the partings of 4<sup>th</sup> year that made you appreciate each other even more.

The project as a whole showed that the intended audience greatly influences how we tell a story, what we include, and what we leave out. This is worth remembering when we consider all the stories you will tell – to patients, to families, to your own friends and loved ones, to yourselves. Stories are not biochemical facts. They are living things that we shape - and that shape us.

Finally, I loved the funniness and silliness that you chose to emphasize. Medicine, life and death – it's all a serious business. But there has to be room to laugh, to be joyous, and yes, sometimes just be silly. This is part of what it means to be human. Your project reminded your classmates that staying in touch with this aspect of who you are is important; patients too will appreciate knowing you have a human side 😊 This was a lovely note to end on. Best, Dr. Shapiro

---

Dear A and B, I was amazed at how well your final project dovetailed with our speaker. Everyone must chart their own course, but this is not always acknowledged in medicine. B, you are a super talented cartoonist (very, very funny!) and I've always been intrigued by the concept of using visual and narrative storytelling motifs to learn basic science material. All success with your company.

Of course, cartoons are only as good as the stories they implicate, and both of your stories were authentic and honest. Thank you for being willing to talk about why you each took off a year, and how that changed you. A, one of the observations that struck me the most about your pursuit of the MPH was the pervasive hostility expressed toward physicians. This actually surprised me in an MPH context, but shows the ease with which we settle into our comfortable silos, and how challenging it can be to engage in boundary-crossing. B, you were hilarious (and creative) about your foray into intensive research (I see narwhals too when I look at data graphs 😊). Both of you were refreshingly candid about needing space to contemplate medicine from a different vantage point; and equally straightforward about what it was like to return. Your openness and sincerity I hope gave permission to your classmates to recognize that there are many paths up the mountain of medicine.

I wish you both the best in your endeavors next year and beyond. Warmly, Dr. Shapiro