

ART OF DOCTORING 2010 FINAL PROJECTS III

--, I've been privileged to hear before about the loss of your mom, but thinking of what you - and she - must have gone through always brings tears to my eyes. I never before understood exactly how her disease and passing connected with your motivation to become a physician, and I appreciated understanding that. I don't mean to sound trite or Pollyannaish, but you are like a living tribute to your mom and all she endured, both good and bad (and of course you are much more than that). I think because of this experience you are especially able to understand medicine from the patient's perspective, and to recognize so clearly that indeed it is a privileged profession because it operates as the core of human existence. Sure, it can be boring and routinized and you can get lost in hassles and paperwork, but if you step back you are sharing many of the most significant moments of a person's life (and death). Understanding this, and having the moral courage to educate, talk, laugh, and cry with your patients will indeed make you a "great" physician.

The other aspect of your presentation that really moved me was your tribute to your classmates. Your slideshow was full of funny, endearing, sweet and silly images, and what came across most clearly through them was how much these people meant to you and vice-versa. I am so glad that you shared your affection and gratitude in class. These are the things we don't say enough to our fellow human beings, and we should. Finally, in my view, the ability to reach out and connect should not be reserved only for loved ones or patients, but should be equally extended to your peers and colleagues. Your slideshow is proof that you know how to do this very well. Sharing the journey of medicine with those who understand it best will nurture and empower both you and your fellow travelers. Continue to treasure your friendships, your loved ones, your patients, and the opportunity to be a doctor. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Thank you SO MUCH for sharing your journey (on so many levels!) to Tanzania. It was an extremely thoughtful presentation that I believe engaged all of us. I especially appreciated that it was not "just" a travelogue, but showed clearly exactly how the experience affected you as people and as physicians. I was struck by several things: 1) The idea of "stripped-down" medicine, i.e., that when all the technology and medications and sterile environments are stripped away you realize a) how much you miss them but b) that you are operating (sorry for the pun) at the heart of medicine: one person suffering and another person trying to alleviate that suffering. It is a simple yet powerful realization, and hopefully once you have it you can add back all the cool and necessary machines and drugs without losing sight of what it's all about. 2) The pervasiveness of generosity in the town where you worked. It is easy (and understandable) to pay attention to how stressed-out, miserable, overworked, and put-upon we are in our daily lives, and how resentful we can become of giving anything more from our already depleted stockpile. Fair enough. But there is something sobering – and corrective – in seeing how people who truly have nothing give of themselves so freely. Gratitude is a discipline and a practice. 3) Appreciation of difference. Sometimes we have to go half-way around the world to find the common humanity we share with others, no matter how different in appearance, language, culture, customs, values, and assumptions we are from them. We can cross a few streets in this country and discover difference equally as great if not more so. Yet often our tolerance flags in such encounters. I loved how you were embraced and how you embraced this experience for all its challenges and frustrations. The image of the kids singing and dancing in the church service will stay with me a long time. Like gratitude, joy is also a discipline and a practice. This was both an instructive and moving presentation. Great work you two. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Hi --, I enjoyed the slideshow of your journey from college through medical school (and beyond). I really appreciated the honesty and clarity with which you tackled the tension between idealism and realism, in the process identifying what is most important to you in life. I don't know if you were in class the day I mentioned Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen's idea that compassion and caring should overflow from our brimming reservoir of joy and love, rather than feeling like we're constantly scraping the bottom of our barrel to find the last remnants of these qualities. I think this is relevant to your realization that you need to prioritize family and friends (fill yourself up) not *at the expense of career*, but so you can *have* a meaningful and fulfilling career (giving out to others). The ability to honestly recognize that "your heart wasn't always there" (in the practice of medicine) is a crucial insight. It is your body, heart, and soul telling you something is out of balance. Most doctors aren't willing to listen to this message, and as a result become cynical and burned-out. You not only listened, you had the courage to say to all of us, "This is me. This is what I need to be a good person and a good doctor." If you continue to pay attention to what is true for you, you will flourish in both your personal relations and your professional life. Thank you for tackling an issue of such importance to everyone in the room. Dr. Shapiro

Dear --, I have always loved your enthusiasm, your verbal fluency, the obvious connection between your mind and your heart. You have so much to say in most situations, and you say it so well and with such passion. So it was a surprise, but a lovely one, that you decided on restraint for this project. Truly, a picture can be worth a thousand words, and your picture fulfilled that maxim. I think it says a lot about your warm, nonjudgmental, and inclusive personality that you were able to find pictures with everyone in class. I also really liked the way you have paid attention to so many of the "moments" in medicine. It is easy to lose track of these, and as you noted, they are precious. Like others in the class, your photo and talk emphasized just how important your classmates were to you over the past four years. Your affection and gratitude to them came through clearly, and it was a wonderful message to give to them. People don't always know just how much they mean, or how much they helped and supported and just made life more bearable or more fun. I think you conveyed all this and more! Best, Dr. Shapiro

As always, --, your calm and gentle wisdom came through in your final AoD project. You remind me of a still lake, calm and unruffled, yet with great depths. Your insights about sacrifice, perseverance, and passion were truly profound. I know more than a few medical students (and residents and doctors!) struggle with a sense of how much they've had to give up for the profession of medicine. Many of these try to right the balance with expensive cars, big houses, and fancy vacations. Perhaps not surprisingly, these things don't fill the hole. As you astutely observe, what balances our sacrifice is passion (a cool vacation now and then doesn't hurt either :-)). Your passion came through unequivocally, not only for medicine, but for dancing, which I imagined might be kind of like a movement meditation for you. Finally, your comments about the social and political context in which doctoring occurs really filled a gap – we tend to focus on doctor-patient interactions as something that happens between two people, and forget how much of that encounter is determined by larger social and economic forces. --, you are clearly someone with impressive self-awareness and self-understanding, comfortable – and humble - in your own skin, ready to learn from your stumbles, to work with your difficult emotion, and to turn all your experiences to the good as much as is possible. It was a privilege to have you in this class. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear --, thank you for sharing your experiences in India with us. Actually, one of the images that lingered most in my mind was the picture of the flowers woven into your hair. It was simultaneously so beautiful and so generous, and really touched me. For people who have so

little to look for ways to bring beauty into the lives of others was a powerful lesson for all of us. I hope you don't think it too much of a stretch, but I sometimes think of physicians as bringing a certain kind of moral beauty into people's lives through reducing their suffering, isolation, and fear. May you continue to "weave flowers" into the lives of your patients as you proceed through residency and beyond. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Honestly, --, I think you should print up your "checklist" and distribute it to all your classmates. If you pasted it on your refrigerator (or better yet, had it pop up automatically on your iphone :-)), you would all be happier and better doctors next year! I especially valued that your list was at least in part influenced by what you had learned, not as a physician, but as a patient and as the family member of loved ones who were hospitalized. It is in these situations that we can see most clearly what matters. As with all good things, your list was simple and basic: listen to patients, care about them, don't punish them, accept imperfection while striving your best, love what you do. These are easy to say, but sometimes oh-so-hard to put into practice. But practice is the key. If you ask yourself every day in residency, how well did I listen to Sr. Garcia? How much did I really care about Mrs. Jones? you will deepen and solidify the essential lessons that mean so much to your patients. Best, Dr. Shapiro

-- I've enjoyed your poems in the past and I enjoyed this one as well. I imagined it as an ode to your patients, and was very touched by the hand it extended to all of them, past, present, and future. You managed to encapsulate all the important aspects of patient care – making patients feel welcomed and "wanted" (what a nice thought that is!), rather than rejected and alone; speaking truth with compassion and clarity, rather than sending mixed messages; presence (just being there); willingness to confront problems directly; really listening and being careful with language (words *do* wound!). Finally, I really liked that you included the idea of "paying forward" the healing that you achieve. To me, this cyclical view is a much more satisfying way to think of life than the linear "I help/you receive." We must all help each other, right? :-). Thank you! Dr. Shapiro

--, it's hard for me to put into words how much I have enjoyed getting to know you a bit over the years. I love your self-deprecating sense of humor, your obvious intelligence, and your absolutely consistent kindheartedness. Your "Thank-You Note to Patients" was, simply put, incredible. It moved everyone listening because somehow you were able to express all the gratitude, all the respect, all the joy, despair, fear, frustration, love, and hate that at various times every doctor has felt toward every patient. I also liked so much what you wrote about the importance of patients' stories. You are so right, I believe, that it is the stories of the patients that inspire and motivate their doctors (sadly, sometimes the doctors never know the stories). This tribute was eloquent, aware, humble, and profound. Although we all resonated to it, only you could have written it. Although there still may be a patient or two out there who thinks you're just a kid, you are a very wise person with a unique and compelling voice. Thank you for sharing it with us. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear --, given your recent (and now thankfully behind you!) travails, I thought your depiction of your not-a-straight-line journey was particularly apropos. Medicine does indeed offer many opportunities, much excitement, and more than its fair share of challenges. I respected that you included the concern (disdain?) with which your family greeted your choice of specialty. As I'm sure you're well aware, that view (unfortunately) is not uncommon in medicine either. Yet in the

past decade, I've seen so many of our best students choose this specialty. Of course, there are multiple reasons for this, but I believe one reason is that students see psych as a place where they can truly encounter their patients (at times, in all their strangeness!), listen to their stories, and connect with them on a human level. I really liked that you acknowledged both failure and success, frustration and hope. Sometimes, as you obviously know, we have to look for the rays of light, but they are there. I'm glad you've found yours, and hope you will always continue to do so. Wishing you the very best next year and beyond, Dr. Shapiro

This was a wonderful meditation on time, --, and its relationship to healing, a clever play on the old adage, "Time heals all wounds." I appreciated the way you apprehended the fluidity of time, how it is both objective and subjective; and how it can be bent to our priorities. I also really valued that you realized not only physicians run out of "time," but patients do to, often in ways that are much more devastating. At least in my reading, you suggest that since life is fleeting ("only a few moments"), it is incumbent on us to use it in the best, most compassionate ways possible. Thank you for your thoughts. Dr. Shapiro

Wow, I'm really sorry the class couldn't have heard you present this great project, -- (and now I'm *really* valuing your name for all it can contain :-)). Not only did you obviously put a great deal of effort – and art – into this work, but it was so informative and interesting. I don't know too much about Hinduism, but my husband (who is retired) spent most of last year reading M's account of Ramakrishna (don't know if you are familiar, I think perhaps not a mainstream strand?). As filtered through my husband, I did absorb a little of Rama's philosophy and certainly benefitted from his wisdom. I loved everything you included, but I especially resonated to the idea of uplift, and turning burdens into an uplifting experience. Not easy, but so worthwhile .The Frost poem I found very relevant because, as I recall it, the narrator partly longs for surcease, so your interpretation of the "miles" as burden rings very true. Thank you for sharing about the Super Specialty Hospital – *all* services free of charge?! This is a beautiful translation of the saying, "Service to man is service to God." Isn't this karma yoga? Finally, I admired your commitment to learning to find *ananda* in the daily life of residency. Again not easy, but I believe very possible. You have the spiritual "tools" - discipline, prayer, faith, community – and you obviously already put them into practice. Life always challenges us, but you sound well-prepared to be a spiritual "warrior." All good wishes for the match and beyond. Dr. Shapiro

Dear --, thank you for contributing such a moving poem. You chose a very challenging patient, suffering from locked-in syndrome, and plunged fearlessly into exploring his point of view. Your insights were empathic and very perceptive, conveying at least something of what his experience must be like. I was totally blown away by your comment regarding how physicians can "lock in" ordinary patients. That was just brilliant! As I mentioned, I've read Bauby's Diving Bell and Butterfly and saw the movie (amazing), but I never made that conceptual leap. That was enormously valuable.

It has been a pleasure to see you grow and evolve over the last 4 years. Your mom and dad must be so proud of you. I wish you the "perfect" match and all joy and happiness beyond. Best, Dr. Shapiro

--, as I have discovered through perusal of your publications and essays, you are a true scholar and original thinker. I have been deeply impressed and touched by your work, and very grateful that I had this opportunity to develop a better understanding of your “extracurricular” activities over the past four years. Your poem was in this tradition – highly intelligent, well-crafted, and brimming with authenticity, humanism, and beauty. It also was very funny in places :-). As I mentioned in class, it seemed to me to represent a next step along your path, turning back to extend a hand to those coming up behind you. I know that this willingness to reach out is a part of your nature that you readily share with patients, family, friends, and “lowly” medical students (:-)). Your evident self-awareness and capacity for self-reflection will ensure that you remain open, trustworthy, and clear-sighted, no matter the challenges – and rewards – that lie ahead. All the best next year and beyond. Dr. Shapiro