

ART OF DOCTORING FINAL PROJECTS 2010-11

Hi --, and thanks for such a great project. Why am I not surprised you chose happiness for your topic?! (You really seem like a happy person :-)) I appreciated your investigation of this subject, bringing interesting and pertinent research to the attention of your classmates. Your highlighting that happiness does not result so much from accumulating goodies as from living a meaningful life and doing good for others was an especially good rebalancing of the classic American dream. I also liked your "hook" of the QOL assessment at the start - right away it made me curious as to how you'd be using it. You showed a lot of skill in facilitating the group discussion - for me this was the most significant part of the presentation: how to take somewhat abstract research studies and begin thinking about how to apply them to daily life. As you so ably demonstrated, there is a lot that we can do to influence our own happiness. Residency, as you reminded us, is a period in many lives that is short on happiness. It is undeniably a very demanding and stressful experience, but I don't think residents should relinquish their "inalienable right" to happiness. Your presentation helped show that they don't have to! Wishing you the very best next year and beyond, Dr. Shapiro

Dear --, THANK YOU so much for having the courage to share your amazing letter to your father with the class. I know it was hard to read aloud, but I am very glad you did. Speaking those heartfelt words in a public way was, to me, the most remarkable tribute to your father's enduring presence in your life. How very profound that, of all the knowledgeable, wise teachers you have no doubt had in medical school, it was your dad who has taught you the most about how to be a doctor. And what invaluable lessons he conveyed - that a patient who has died doesn't mean only less work for the resident, but immeasurable grief for loved ones left behind; that jokes at patients' expense, no matter how harmless their intention, are never appropriate; that patients should never be given an expiration date; and that whatever time a patient and family have are priceless. I feel humbled and grateful that I was able to witness in this way your ongoing love and admiration for your father. I'm sure he would be very proud of you as a physician and a person. Wishing you all the best as your life unfolds, Dr. Shapiro

Hey --, I appreciate your making the long trek up from campus to present your project. I'm sure you took many of your classmates with you when you revisited your earlier thoughts about anatomy; and your more recent experience with a truly challenging patient. Thanks for this thoughtful "look back," and especially for the truly eloquent statement you made in class about the value of reflection. Soren Kierkegaard wrote, "We live our lives forward, but understand them backwards." Medicine as a profession is by necessity and design driven by forward momentum. Doctors are not philosophers, and that is a good thing. Your lives are filled to the brim and overflowing with action, doing, decisions. But once in awhile, precisely because of the intensity of the events you experience, it is important to pause and think about what has happened. Sometimes, as you humbly admitted, we are not the people we know ourselves to be. Other times (rarely), we transcend our own expectations, and try to figure out how the heck we did it. Sometimes we pause to grieve, or to celebrate. But without reflection, our life passes by with only part of us on board; and at the end we wonder what happened, and who it happened to. So I hope you will keep reflecting as needed, and keep true to yourself as a result. Wishing you all the best in your future endeavors, Dr. Shapiro

This is a true gift to your classmates, --, to share “from the other side” about your son’s birth, and the potential complexities that lie on the other side of bringing a new life into the world. I really like your reflection on how this experience has affected your views of doctoring. As a future pediatrician, I especially appreciate your emphasis on the family. Although many pediatricians are wonderfully skilled in working with parents (I’ve decided that, when their kid is sick, all parents become slightly crazy ;-)), some treat parents as a nuisance or an obstacle. I believe this comes from a lack of empathy. By contrast, you have a vivid understanding of just what it is like to be the parent – because now you *are* the parent. Finally, In this age of EBM, it takes courage to see that everything is not simply “by the book,” but as you point out, there is no owner’s manual for life either. Thanks for sharing, Dr. Shapiro

Dear --, --, and --, thanks for your creative final presentation. I appreciated the teamwork it took to put it together. And I liked seeing such a lovely collaboration among 3 future family docs :-). It was a wonderful review of the past 4-5 years, and as we discussed in class, the lilting rhythm of the guitar and the lighthearted narrative put many of those confusing, stressful, and overwhelming experiences into perspective. Five years later, you and your colleagues were able to chuckle empathetically about the people you were. All those questions of will I make it? Can I survive it? How lost am I? How scared am I? Who am I? have been resolved (or at least you’re asking them at a different level!). What came through clearly was, despite the challenges and difficulties, your love for your patients and your caring for each other, your gratitude, and yes, your happiness. You provided your classmates with a beautiful way of summarizing this phase of your life, and a strong foundation for moving forward. Indeed, I believe that somehow, through your own strength and determination and the love and support of so many around you, at the end of all this you *are* better people. Wishing you all the best next year and beyond. Dr. Shapiro

--, what a delicious project :-). You used it to make several good points: 1) Cooking is an art, and one that can be as healing and nurturing as painting a picture or listening to music. 2) The heart pumps to itself first. Physicians need to have self-care so that they can care for others. Proper nutrition is an important way both of taking care of the physical body; and also lavishing some well-deserved caring on yourself. 3) The act of eating is so much more than fueling the body. It is at its best a shared communal act that can bring disparate people together. I LOVED your idea of occasionally sharing a meal with a patient. I was very moved by the image of your pulling up a chair and eating your cafeteria meal in a lonely patient’s room. 4) Finally, although you were too modest to make this point explicitly, I noticed that you did not just make cookies for yourself, but for all of us. Thus cooking can be a generous act, an act of service, a way of giving and nurturing others. So this simple project carried a great weight of significance. Nicely done! Dr. Shapiro

It was wonderful to see your art, --, and to hear the stories behind your paintings. You are so talented! Seeing these patients added depth and passion to their narratives. I appreciated your comments about the patient who was a double amputee, greeted you with anger and hostility, and had decided his life was not worth living; I was moved by the plight of the kid with osteomyelitis who was a parental child to his chronically ill mother; I raged at the guilty grief of the father from India whose son had resistant TB because they did not have the money to continue the original treatment; and I applauded your realization that pity pushes us away from patients. These images will linger with me a long, long time. Each one was not only technically skillful, but exuded empathy and humanism. Thank you for sharing these. Dr. Shapiro

Dear --, you used the art of poetry to tackle the core discrepancy (what some would say is a Grand Canyon) between the professed ideals of medicine, its conceptualization as a calling, a profession, not a career, and the often cynical, callous, indifferent, self-focused, and occasionally cruel reality of daily practice. No wonder medical students become disillusioned, and wonder what is really true. As you say, medical education changes students, and not always for the better. But in your concluding lines, I think you spoke the truest truth: Despite the difficulties, despite the harsh awakenings, indeed for the most part you are “not smothered,” and you will go forward in your respective paths to continue to hold the profession accountable for what it should – and I’d like to believe, can – be. I know that in your future work, whatever precise form it takes, you will continue to hold medicine’s feet to the fire.

I also wanted to thank you again for your email re our last AoD session. Not only was it kind, but it helped me toward a more nuanced understanding of what had happened and what my role was. I am truly grateful for your insights.

Best, Dr. Shapiro

--, writing a letter to your colleagues was a terrific idea. In a letter you speak directly to the other person, and your letter was very much an I-Thou exchange. It was very moving to listen to you express your gratitude and admiration for your fellow-students, to acknowledge just how much they’ve inspired and given you. As you shared, they’ve been your role models and support. They’ve taught you invaluable lessons about unswerving dedication to patients, commitment to social justice, the importance of family, the sustaining power of faith. As I mentioned in class, I believe it is so important to let people know periodically how much we appreciate them, and how much they help us. We may think they know this already, but it is a great gift to put into words. It was clear to me looking at the faces of your classmates as they listened to your beautiful acknowledgment how much your words meant to them. I hope that as you proceed through life, you will continue to find colleagues with whom you can develop such cherished and meaningful connections. All the best, Dr. Shapiro

--, your comments in class about your “collaboration” with Ernesto were very funny, and showed what good friends you are. I think there is something very powerful about writing someone a letter of gratitude. You are not speaking *about* them, but directly *to* them, and it makes the communication all the more powerful. I think your classmates were very moved by what you expressed to them. From what I know of other medical schools, I agree with your observations that UCI students are unusual in being willing to forge exceptionally close, supportive bonds. As was evident at our last session, you guys really know how to care for each other. I loved your fantasy of running a hospital together. As you explored what this might look like (and how wonderful it would be!), I was particularly struck by the line you read which said, “We would help each other be our best selves.” I hope that wherever your path in life leads, you will continue to find people who will encourage your efforts to be your best self. There is nothing more rewarding and precious. Best, Dr. Shapiro

--, I applaud your courage in writing an honest personal statement. Bravo. By sharing your encounters with depression with your classmates and faculty, you claimed that aspect of who you are. As you well know, mental issues still carry stigma, ironically *especially* in medicine where an ethos prevails that practitioners should be tough, macho, and seemingly “perfect.” Of course, they are not, and the effort to pretend otherwise over the course of a career and a lifetime becomes exhausting and deeply dissatisfying. The reality is, we are all wounded in one way or another; but

that is not necessarily a bad thing, and certainly not a thing of shame, because that is pretty much the definition of being human. If more of us could own that woundedness, integrate it into our identities, acknowledge and learn from it, I think we would all be better people, and more capable of helping others to heal. (You might be interested in learning, if you don't know already, that the Catholic theologian Henri Nouwen wrote extensively about the construct of "the wounded healer," postulating that it is in fact our own woundedness that is the source of our capacity to empathize with and serve others). As I shared in your earlier essay, the gardening metaphor is so well-taken – especially the acknowledgment that gardening is sometimes a four-letter word :-). To cultivate something and foster its growth takes care, persistence, hard work, patience, love, and faith. It is clear to me you have all these qualities in abundance. Thank you again for taking this risk. I believe it was valuable for your classmates, but it was most important for yourself. Best of luck as your future path unfolds, Dr. Shapiro

--, it is hard to write to you as though "nothing happened" at our last session, but because of your gracious and bighearted email, I feel better that you are resolved and do not need anything further about this event. So my comments below focus on your project, but please know that if you have additional thoughts or concerns you'd like to share, I am here to hear them.

That being said, I actually thought it was the best possible ending for the session to conclude with the abundance of your writing. You write – indeed, I suspect you *live* – right from the heart. You come from a great tradition that reveres poetry. I wish I was more conversant with the great Persian poets (I'm limited to Rumi and Hafez :-)), but I feel that their rhythms, nuances, and subject matter resonate in your own work. To me you have a natural inclination for what poetry can say, and how it can make others feel. You write deeply and fearlessly about love and life. Your imagery is vivid and original. When you read, I was immersed in your world. I was especially touched by the way you wrote about your patients, in one case adopting a VA patient's voice, in the essay about your "first kiss" showing the selfless decision to support the patient rather than pursuing your educational goals. That act transcended language, culture, age, and doctor-patient roles. You were a human reaching out to another frightened, vulnerable human. --, I know you will always do the right thing because your heart, as physician Rachel Remen says, so brims over with joy and love that it inevitably spills over to all those around you.

Thank you once again for the maturity, grace, and strength you brought to the unfortunate incident last week. Thank you simply for being an amazing person and a wonderful doctor. I am so glad that there will be people like you in medicine. Best, Dr. Shapiro

I resonated to your passion, your empathy, and the way you embrace life, love, and medicine. You know how to make language work for you in unique, beautiful, and unexpected ways.

Dear -- and --, what an adorable and insightful project. I thought the metaphor of the growing child was perfect to represent your growth over the last 4 years. Each figure encapsulated the essence of that year (the idealism of first year, the challenging emptiness/fullness of second year, the vanished personal life of third year, and the happier aspect of fourth year, where you begin to reclaim pieces of yourself), as evidenced by the rueful laughter of recognition that the pictures elicited. Your little paper dolls were both vulnerable and hardy, flourishing despite all they'd been through. I hope their courage and resilience predicts your futures, next year and beyond. All best, Dr. Shapiro

Hi you guys, this was one of the best projects ever! I was completely blown away by your creativity and originality. These skits were amazing. As I mentioned in class, I've never seen skits using this particular combination of narration and mime. I was astonished by the intensity and nuances of the emotions you were able to convey nonverbally, and I thought this approach was an excellent reminder of how much we can learn by attending to this aspect of patients' behavior. The whole conceit of a medical student reunion was quite clever, and introduced the perspective that, once out in "real life," you may actually feel nostalgic for the good old days. I also liked the way the skits evolved, from the naive cluelessness of the 1st year student with the SP, to the 3rd year totally bewildered lost sheep guarding the surgeon's glasses. You skewered attendings when they needed it (the MRDA avoidant doctor), but also showed just how skillful and compassionate physicians can be (the breaking bad news and domestic violence scenarios). Overall, your skits were hilarious, moving, perceptive, and sensitive. They presented this particular rite of passage in an unforgettable way. Superb work. Wishing you all the best next year and in the future, Dr. Shapiro

--, yours was the perfect project to end on. Your first theme of what your patients have taught you is, I believe, perhaps the most important lesson to take away from your training. I loved the Maya Angelou quote about people never forgetting how you made them feel. This is so true. I was very moved by the image of your cleaning up your cancer patient, and the powerful sketch of this young man. It was a beautiful statement of how doctors can truly serve their patients, and the humility they need to do so. It was also wonderful to hear again your tribute to that sassy, smart young woman who had overdosed to cry out against her desperate life but who had not given up hope. The oil lamp representing all the light your optimistic yet dying patient was willing to share with you was beautifully unique. And your "repurposing stuff" carried on the vision of your old lady patient who say potential in even the most ordinary and discarded objects. Integrated with this theme of recognizing the gifts your patients gave you was a second, even more touching theme, of what your father gave you by "raising you like a boy," and teaching you how to work on cars and use tools. The objects you made were a tribute to him as well. By reclaiming this legacy, you honor your father and bring him with you into your future. You are a beautiful, brave soul, --, and I wish you much fulfillment, happiness, and peace as you continue your journey. All best, Dr. Shapiro

--, thank you for focusing the class on a deeply perplexing and troubling issue in medicine today: in an inequitable and unfair healthcare system, how do you as physicians come to emotional and moral terms with sometimes having to practice a suboptimal even inferior standard of care with underserved and vulnerable patient populations? I don't think there are any easy answers to this question, but it is critically important to think about it, especially for individuals who are motivated to serve these patients. I believe that the incapacity to practice the medicine one was trained to practice contributes significantly to the development of burn-out and cynicism in even the most idealistic of physicians. Yet the solution cannot be simply to turn away from these settings. Indeed, it is a difficult dilemma, one which is more comfortable and easier to ignore. You had the courage to shine a much-needed light. All best, Dr. Shapiro

--, you came up with the perfect metaphor for the medical student experience – the growing plant. At each stage, hearing the rueful laughter of your peers, it was obvious that you captured the essence of that experience – the overwhelming nature of year 1 and the realization that you won't always be the best; the need for balance (and sanity) in year 2; the lack of autonomy in year 3; and the emergence of competence and direction in year 4. Through it all, the plant continued to grow (thank goodness) (while the books went up and down :-)). The most enduring image was

the last, when you transplanted the little plant into the forest. For some reason, that was very powerful for me, perhaps because you (and all your classmates) are indeed ready to enter the forest, to become tall, beautiful trees that provide shade, shelter, and nurturance for others.

I'm very glad you stuck with this class, --. You've been a wonderful addition, always thoughtful and aware in both your written work and your in-class comments. I wish you continued growth and wisdom as you progress through your training. May you be a mighty tree. All best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear --, thank you for your lovely essay, "I Am" describing humorously and perceptively how you've changed over the past four years. You are so right, these years are indeed a memorable time. Your learning curve is so steep on so many levels – intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. I think the rueful chuckles of your classmates indicated how much they resonated with your experiences – the initial feelings of fear, anxiety, being overwhelmed obviously struck a chord. But so did the evolution of competence, confidence, and compassion. As I noted in class, one of the lines I liked best was your awareness that you had your "self" (as well as all the medicine you've learned) to offer your patients, and what a precious gift that is. You are so ready for the next step – much good luck in taking it! All best, Dr. Shapiro

Hi guys, just wanted to let you know how wonderful I thought your Medical School for Dummies guidebook was. First, we all have that little scared, confused kid in us, no matter how old and seemingly competent we get, so the format was inspired! When we're feeling overwhelmed and uncertain, it helps to have things broken down into simple, simpler, and simplest. Second, it was laugh-out-loud funny, one of the surest stress relievers and antidotes for distress and despair. Third, the topics themselves were spot-on. I found the personal statement section especially hilarious because I used to read a lot of these for med school and residency, and you did a pitch perfect job of highlighting all the words that stimulate my gag reflex :-). The helpful first year hints about putting the stethoscope on "loud," and relishing one's last summer vacation were great, as was the advice not to try to fake 2nd year because "they know when you're faking," to forget daylight, and strive to be perfect. Your sage counsel for the clinical years was just as funny, but also made some truly wonderful points about how to cope with bad behavior, how not to take competition too personally, how not being afraid to be moved by patients, how to take a little time for self-care and relationship care and avoid burn-out. I was so touched to find myself incorporated into your words of wisdom – I have plenty of WW___D people myself that I carry in my heart to pull out as needed; and it was an incredible honor to think I might occasionally serve the same purpose for you. Thank you.

I am passing along the Dummy book along to --, with the understanding that you've given her permission to include it as a resource for rising first years. I think this is a fabulous idea, you say more that is true about medical school in a few pages than most orientation sessions do – and with a lot more laughs and a lot better stickers :-). Absolutely great, creative, and original work! I'm very impressed, and know you will carry forward your wisdom, clarity, generosity, and laughter in residency and beyond. Wishing you all the best, Dr. Shapiro