

ART OF DOCTORING FINAL PROJECTS II 3/08

Hi --. I really enjoyed your thoughts. You turned something that could have been a bit mundane (memories of medical school) into a thoughtful and erudite exploration of what memory is, how we construct our memories, and why they matter. I was intrigued by your point about “inconsequential” memories, and started to wonder what is it about these memories that makes them remain with us, and whether they are indeed as trivial as we judge them to be. I especially liked the possibility that we can play a role in choosing our memories, as you did simply by choosing to create those slides, and not others; and that this selection in part defines our past, while potentially also shaping our future. Altogether, a memorable (:-) presentation. Thanks! Dr. Shapiro

--, I absolutely loved that you worked on your box with your mom! That says a lot of good things about your relationship with her :-). It was also a fabulous suggestion by a very wise ped attending. As I'm sure you are already well-aware, residency can be all about getting out of clinic, clearing your hospitalized patients, keeping your R3s happy, passing exams, completing charts etc. What a wonderful “alternative” method of evaluating your success. Your box was beautiful. It will be exactly the kind of thing curious little kids will be drawn to, and ask, “What’s in the box, doc?” It struck me as a colorful, creative, cozy, and welcoming home for all the memories you will acquire over the next three years; the memories that, at the end of residency, may be the ones that matter most. Btw, as a big quote person, I really enjoyed the decorative quotes with which you surrounded your box. In this way, your box will be an accessible reminder of many of your closely held values. Kudos to you (and your mom :-):-)). Best, Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. I felt privileged to be present at your presentation. It was a wonderfully affectionate and grateful tribute to the many important relationships in your life – your classmates, your friends, your family, the love of your life. It made me think that, in the end, in so many ways, it is our relationships that give our lives meaning. It was very moving to have this chance to share (even superficially) in your relationships, and to see what strong connections you had made with so many classmates over the past four years. I also appreciated your theme of new beginnings – indeed, you are about to begin yet again. It became clear to me during your slideshow that each new beginning carries along with it all that we have become as a result of our previous new beginnings. Hopefully this makes each subsequent beginning richer and deeper. I am confident that this will be the case for you next year. Best of luck, Dr. Shapiro

--, I really liked your slide show. “A trip down memory lane” might become trite, but you infused yours with affection and meaning. I very much resonated with your

observations about the journey vs. the destination. As you observed, having goals is good, but we are not always in complete control of realizing all our goals. It is at least as important to relish what happens along the way. I was impressed that you were able to do that during medical school, when so many of your peers lose (at least temporarily) their way, lose themselves, and lose their sense of proportion. I was also interested in your comments about how the feelings, associations, and meanings of so many of the images you offered us had shifted significantly over the past 4 years. Btw, although you may not think of yourself as a “creative” person, your photographs were really really good. Especially considering that you did not rely on people so much to create emotion, I was struck at how powerful and evocative your work was. Keep a camera handy during residency! Thanks again, Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. Thank you for sharing your memory box. I have to say that what I appreciated so deeply was not the content of your box, but the way in which you became so moved in considering each item. It was a sure indication to me that the box was filled with things that were deeply precious to you. Your grandfather, for example, has imbued you with an irreplaceable legacy. Clearly your parents and family have been an enduring source of strength and support, as has your wife, who even in a photograph exudes an inner beauty. Because you are so obviously a highly intelligent and perceptive thinker, I was surprised by the significance of the AOA pin for you (btw, congratulations, that is a great honor); yet this vulnerability and humbleness in you showed me a different side of --. Altogether, it was a lovely summing up. I wish you all the best next year and in the future. Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. What a lot there is to “excavate” since first year, yes? I really enjoyed the creative way in which you took the memory box idea and turned it into a (future) archeological expedition. This was interesting to me because of the implication (perhaps unintended by you :-)) that we bury a lot in our lives. But, unlike you, we often don’t go back to retrieve them. I have the feeling that when you go back for your serendipitously “found” jar in three or four years, you will be happy you have it. I also suspect that the quirky, touching, funny, meaningful objects that you seal away will help both remind you of and help you better understand this strange, exhilarating, demanding phase of your life. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear --, since I’ve already responded to your story, I won’t do so again. However, I’ve now read/heard it three times (when you initially sent it to me; when I ran across it in the Plexus submissions; and when you shared it in class). Each time I’ve encountered it, it has moved me more. It was such a tragic, devastating, awful thing to have happened to this baby and family; and yet (and I am not trying to “make it all better”) it also was imbued with profound grace, dignity, caring, and humanity on the part of all involved. I think what I’m trying to say is that it is an experience worth spending time with; and I hope that each time you revisited it, it offered you additional meaning. I also valued that although the dad’s final response was

“counter-normative,” in the sense that it “violated” convention about how to say goodbye to a child/infant who has died, you were able to honor and trust his sense of what he and his wife needed to do (or not do), rather than compel conformity to some death-and-dying protocol.

--, I hope I’m not speaking out of turn if I say that on occasion I sensed that this course may have taken an approach that stretched your comfort zone or view of things. If that was not the case, forget it. In any event, I really respected your willingness to explore AoD, your openness to our ideas and discussions, and the many heartfelt comments you contributed. Thank you for being here with us this year. Dr. Shapiro

--, thank you so much for highlighting this aspect of who you are in your final project. It reminded me of how many students start medical school saying they want to help heal the suffering in the world by working in international health; yet by 4th year, how few of them still have been able to retain this goal. It was really lovely to see someone who was bringing such a generous vision to life. What a grand – and frightening – adventure you are embarking on! I truly loved hearing your goals, they were compassionate, exuberant, wise, exciting; but even more I loved hearing your fears. Not that I am happy that you have fears; but it was such an original, bold, and brave thing to do, to make that innermost part explicit. Since all of us have fears every time we push our envelopes a little wider, your project was a wonderful role-modeling for everyone in the room about how to “excavate” (a la X’s jar) our deepest dreads, bring them into the light of day, integrate and even welcome them. Very impressive! I wish you good health in your travels, an open heart, an inquisitive mind... and alles gute (I think that means good luck in German). Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. I had the pleasure of reading your ICU poem (anonymously, but I did recognize it ☺) as part of the Plexus review; so I spoke from the heart (and mind) when I urged your classmates to ask for a copy so they could revisit it. It is well worth it! I think the present version is much improved, and such “strong work” (I love using that phrase to refer to poetry writing ☺). It stays closer to your source material, and as a result ends up being a grittier (and to me more authentic) poem than the earlier draft. Yet it loses none of the evocative imagery that challenges us to expand the borders of how we understand the experience of the narrator. The ending remains heartbreakingly, breathtakingly beautiful. You are such a multi-gifted person. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to read your poetry, see your art, and hear your music – and to have learned something about the art you bring to the practice of medicine as well. All the best, Dr. Shapiro

Thank you, --, for sharing your poetry and essay. This is a perfect opportunity, as you finish medical school, to revisit your role as cancer patient/advocate. Identity is

not nearly as fixed as we think, but more often fluctuating and evolving. You are not the same young woman as you were when you were first diagnosed. The “place” of cancer in your life inevitably changes, as does your relationship to it.

I thought your poem was beautiful, in a gut-wrenching way. The repetition of the phrase “I wish” powerfully underlined the sense of helplessness and lack of control a cancer diagnosis bestows. Your awareness that your life would “never be the same” is at once so true and so heartbreaking.

The essay is very well-written (especially for an undergraduate!) and is a lucid exposition of the stigmatizing aspects of cancer and how those need to be changed. Coincidentally, I’ve been working on a paper extending the concept of stigma to serious illness in general; and arguing that the ill are stigmatized in order to distinguish and differentiate them from the well (thus apparently protecting the well). As you suggest, it is the fears of the well that often create (or at least contribute to) the isolation and alienation of the sick. You are absolutely correct that within both the larger society and even within the culture of medicine, we need to curb the tendencies to see the sick person as “other.”

--, as I’ve mentioned to you before, because of your personal history, you bring a unique perspective to the practice of medicine. “I wish” that that were not the case; and that you never had to endure your disease and treatment. But since you have, what you are doing now is working to integrate your various roles: as cancer patient, as cancer advocate, and as physician. This is a complicated project, but a very worthwhile one. Your perspective from both sides of the fence gives you an informed understanding that will greatly benefit your future patients. Best of luck, -
-, now and in the future. Dr. Shapiro