

AoD STUDENT FEEDBACK 2/24/06

--, I feel how deeply you were affected by this encounter, and I appreciate your willingness to honestly examine how the experience touched you emotionally. It's interesting that, while you were following this little boy so closely, apparently you "did not have any feelings"; but that when you were exposed to a little down-time, you were overcome by intense feelings of sadness of grief. Sometimes our defense mechanisms kick in almost without our knowing it, to "protect" us. In this case, they did the trick, so that you felt "grateful" that you weren't "connecting too closely." Maybe you needed that distance to stay involved with this case. But, as you discovered, your feelings hadn't disappeared, they'd just gone underground. And when you least expect it, they surface, sometimes in distorted and destructive ways. In your case, it sounds as though the tears in the movie theater were cathartic. At last you were in a "safe" environment (a nice dark movie theater, with only your wife's hand, not the performance pressure of residents and attendings), and you allowed yourself to grieve for this little boy. Because you were able to *connect* the two events, because you *knew* you weren't crying about the movie but about this child, this strikes me as a healthy response. It was too scary to grieve while you were taking care of your patient, but later you did mourn all he had lost. It is when you postpone grief indefinitely that you get in trouble. Thanks for sharing, --. Dr. Shapiro

--, thank you for sharing this incredible encounter. The initial event is bad enough, but it almost defies belief that this individual would *remember* the event a year later, and *still* hold a grudge. Ouch. I'm impressed that you and your friend were sufficiently unintimidated that you confronted the professor directly and refused to allow him to malign you behind your backs. I find it truly shocking that someone who is a putative role model would use such language with such vitriol toward students. It is a disgraceful incident.

That having been said, there may something to the idea that even the most terrible people can be our teachers. When I'm on the receiving end of apparently inexplicable rage (from a patient, a colleague, a student), I try to ask myself honestly if there is anything I can learn from the accusation. Do I sometimes come across as cocky (or arrogant, or insensitive, or wishy-washy, or whatever the issue is), even if that is not my intention? If, after reflection, I can answer no, I wonder what makes someone so hyper-sensitive to affront. Sometimes people who have been consistently disrespected or unappreciated imagine insults everywhere. Thinking this makes me feel some compassion for someone who is so angry, so bitter, so paranoid, and so hostile, although this feeling in no way excuses his behavior toward you.

--, I have to say again how awful I feel that you had to experience such insulting treatment from someone who, after all, is my colleague. I wish I could apologize to you on his behalf; I don't have that power, so all I can say is I'm sorry. Best, Dr. Shapiro

