

ART OF DOCTORING 2019-20 FINAL PROJECTS

Dear --, --, and --, the crane project was truly beautiful. I have seen many crane projects over my lifetime (to stop violence, to save schools, to support kids with life-threatening illnesses, and just general to create a sense of hope and healing), and I really liked the way you tied in your cranes to your experiences in medical school.

--, you made a great point that each bird is separate and perhaps the point of the project isn't that clear, but finally "the pieces come together" and it all makes sense. The individual birds also made me think of each of your individual experiences, compromised of different shapes and colors (metaphorically speaking); how each of you is beautiful and unique; and how when you come together as a "flock" (think white-coated medical students and the image is pretty close!) something even more wonderful emerges.

--, I totally loved your non-crane cranes. Your wellness dog was adorable (my visual was a cute little yappy dog running amuck amidst the elegant cranes, and the birds all scattering, adding a bit of humorous chaos to the elegance of your mobile). After all, the thousand cranes projects are all about healing, and what better place to start with yourself. I hope the hospitals to which you're headed all have wellness dogs; and I hope you remember they're not only for the patients.

--, thank you for mentioning that the "miracle" of the thousand cranes is that they fulfill a desired wish. Even though you did not quite make it to the thousand mark, I hope all your wishes for residency and beyond come true. And since the crane in Japan is a symbol of happiness, my wish for you is to always find happiness wherever you go. Thank you for this very lovely and uplifting project.

Dr. Shapiro

Dear -- and --, as I mentioned in class, I am always in awe of MD/PhD students. You are so smart and so dedicated. I know this can be a hard path, and I admired how well you both have navigated it. I also appreciated the honesty with which you acknowledged the challenges, the losses, and the moments of doubt. I felt you showed us in a very authentic way how life happens even as you pursue an arduous and demanding path. You find your soul mate, children are born, a beloved grandma dies, the dog who's been your companion forever dies, you get a new puppy, dissertation advisors heap contempt on your ideas, medical school infantilizes you, new classmates welcome you, you achieve your PhDs, you feel like an MS1 when you are an MS3, you love patient care, you find your tribe... what struck me throughout your narratives is how you seemed to have found your anchors and a confident trust in yourselves – not arrogance, just a kind of comfort with who you are. I hope that is true because it is certainly well-deserved.

--, I just loved your poetic description of research as treading water in the dark, and needing desperately to find a rock on which to stand. I'm so glad both of you found your rocks.

I also was intrigued by both of your thoughtful analyses of the vast differences in expectations, learning modes, and culture between medical education and doctoral education; and how each might be best suited toward the goals it strives to achieve.

-- and --, you've accomplished something major in earning these two degrees, each one prestigious in itself. I hope you continue with your research which sounds on track to make significant contributions to the wellbeing of kids. You are both, as -- expressed it eloquently, "on the precipice of transition," which I suspect you will navigate with all the skill and self-knowledge you've developed up to this point. Wishing you all success, Dr. Shapiro

Dear Team Chocolate, as a sometime meditator, I found your mindful chocolate eating exercise... delicious! It was a wonderful way to really focus us all in the moment, to help us savor the tastiness of a small bite of chocolate, symbolic I am sure of all the sweetness of life ☺ --, you led the exercise very skillfully. As I mentioned, I'm quite familiar with the mindful approach to eating, and you were excellent at bringing out every nuance and dimension of touch, smell, sight, and (yum!) taste. I also liked the way you helped focus on the physical and emotional sensations we were experiencing.

--, you extracted a really interesting lesson from the exercise which had not occurred to me. Being present helps us focus on the simple things which we can overlook or reject because they are, well, simple. Your analogy to complex medical interventions was an excellent one. Also thank you for pointing out that chocolate is really healthy for us. No more guilt!

--, you said it all. No matter what self-discipline we had to exert during the exercise (how hard to attend to visual, olfactory, tactile input when all we wanted to do was gobble!), but in the end we are left with a sense of poignant sweetness, gratitude for all we have received. Again, the parallel to medical school was very apt. It is all too easy to focus on the next future goal. Instead, slow down and be present. What a great lesson to carry forward into residency.

--, the way you emphasized the contrast between "dark" and "chocolate" built perfectly on --'s theme. There is plenty that is very dark indeed in medical education, and it would be foolish to pretend otherwise. That it was hard and demanding is an understatement, but what lingers is the knowledge of all you've gained, experienced, and enjoyed. When you look back, it has been sweet – well, at least bitter-sweet!

Thank you so much for a delectable pause. Through the particular of a small bite of chocolate, you conveyed important universal truths. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear Team Dr. Seuss, Oh The Places You'll Go is one of my favorite children's books. I read it to my children and my grandchildren. Begging to differ with your classmate --, I think it is full of pretty profound wisdom. Your photos captured very well how each of its many lessons was manifested in your lives over the past 4 years.

--, you expressed beautifully how these years have been organized so strongly about the friendship you all have shared, how this has sustained you all through difficult times, and made the good times even more meaningful. And you are right – although you will stay connected, the inevitable separation of residency does create a poignant appreciation for what was.

--, you cut right to the essence. Despite how challenging medical school was at times (often, probably), in the end you are left with a feeling of gratitude for ALL the experiences you've shared

together. And --, you realized that this is a time to savor your experiences together, to recognize how meaningful they've been.

It's been an amazing journey for the three of you, a real gift you gave to each other. How lucky to be concluding medical school with thankfulness. I wish you all the best, Dr. Shapiro

Dear Team Poetry, thanks so much for venturing into the poetic mode. Sometimes poetry can capture certain dimensions of experience that otherwise elude this, and I think your verse did that for medical school.

--, your poem was full of memorable phrases – “the glorious sound of...,” “the soul-filling moments...,” “the fear-inducing bliss of unknowns yet to come” – and I loved the way the poem both began and began again with slightly altered phrasing that illustrated the growth that had occurred. Life is full of beginnings, endings, and new beginnings, and your poem captured this beautifully.

--, the way you repeated certain words and phrases – “stoked and proud,” “oblivious,” “confusion,” – was very effective, altering the meaning depending on who was experiencing the state the word described. You managed to insert a humorous twist I also liked your appeal to the “residency gods” – may they be generous! And keep baby inside till after Match 😊

--, as you may have discovered, haiku can be surprisingly hard to write. But yours exactly summed up through simple yet vivid images some highlights that represented your progression through medical school. You had some terrific lines – “2x podcast is life;” “Okay to wear scrubs?” – that put in a few syllables the more-than-occasional absurdity that is medical education.

--, it was inspired to focus on a single day. Because, after all, our lives are composed of single days, lived one at a time. The analogy to the 5 stages of grief was very creative and provided a wonderful outlet for your mordant sense of humor as, stage by stage, you skewered the foibles and shortcomings of medicine. Such great imagery: “his nod stinks of concern/even though it's sugar free.” Bingo!; “resident fencing;” “inevitably expressed into the ether;” “aka lunch with uninvited background noise’; and perhaps best of all “don't work too hard on this poem, --,” in which the fourth wall is destroyed, the self-conscious narrator is revealed, and those issues of judgment and prioritizing and effort and happiness slam into us all.

As I said, sometimes poetry is the only thing that can tell a certain truth. Thanks so much to you all for telling your truths. Dr. Shapiro