

Hi --. Nice to see you again after the litmed days. I hope you are still reading poetry once in awhile! I enjoyed your return to the Hippocratic Oath, as well as your attempt to “enliven” it. As with most ancient and venerable documents, when you inspect it closely it offers many challenges to contemporary thinking, as well as much support. My favorite line has always been “I will follow that system of regimen which... I consider for the benefit of my patients, and abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous.”” At least do no harm, and try to do some good. Not a bad life philosophy! Thanks, --. Good luck with the remainder of the year. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

--, as I mentioned in class, I appreciated your use of language, and your elegant, spare juxtaposition of the beginning and the end of it all. The fact that you treated both “equally,” in terms of length, phrasing and structure, for me made both seem part of the mystery of life. A lot to think about packed into a small space! Thank-you. Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. It was nice to see you again! Thank you for your meditations on the end of life, and exploring this through the painting of the lilies. The insights about the roots that support and nourish the seemingly fragile lilies were particularly apropos when considering circumstances of life and death. People can be amazing beautiful, strong, and rooted, even in the dying process. And sometimes their physicians can help them refind these qualities in the midst of difficult struggle. A lovely project. Good luck with the rest of the year. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

--, thanks for providing a context in class for your honest and I think heartfelt poem. I’m only sorry that you felt the pc police were too much in evidence to be able to share these thoughts and feelings with your peers and the faculty. In our family medicine clinic in Santa Ana, I hear sentiments like these voiced on a weekly if not daily basis. They are real, important questions that need to be asked and you asked them well and forcefully. The kinds of issues you’re wrestling with are often discovered at the core of clinical medicine. I think there are answers to such questions that respect the patient, preserve the physician’s humanity, yet recognize that profound differences in priorities, understandings, and expectations can exist between patient and physician. If at any time you’d like to pursue these issues further, please know that I am very willing to “enter the dialogue,” without judgment but only with a desire to struggle jointly toward resolution. By the way, “Care” was very-well-written and insightful. Good work. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

--, I think the issue you raise is a fascinating one, with no simple answer, but one which every physician needs to resolve for him or herself. What is the proper emotional distance between doctor and patient? In medical training, distance and detachment are supposed to protect from being overwhelmed by all that, as physicians, you see and hear. But these strategies of emotional disconnect can also leave physicians unfulfilled, frustrated, and burned-out. Perhaps there are ways of experiencing “an epiphany for the humane” (a beautiful phrase, by the way) without “drowning” in your patient’s suffering. I liked this poem a lot, each “drop” of it! Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Thank you for completing a reflection on your music. It helped me to understand more of what you were trying to express, although I agree that because music is so emotionally powerful, it can often help us get in touch with feelings that are otherwise hard to access. I appreciated the metaphor of life as a song (although you’re not the first person to think of this!). Like your composition, life is full of joys and sorrows, beginnings and ultimate ending. Thanks for sharing. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Neat photograph! I was very interested in what you had to say about medical student life as a performance. Many post-modern critics have argued that life itself is a performance, with each of us assuming a variety of roles based on our own and others’ expectations. When do we put the masks aside, and become our true selves? Is there even such a thing as a true self? Perhaps on a more pragmatic level, what’s important is to learn how to avoid feeling like a “fake” as new roles are mastered, and not to lose sight of what we identify as our core “self.” A thoughtful project indeed. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

--, you created a really interesting project. I liked the idea of building layers as you proceed through medical school, progressing from bare-bone (sorry) cadaver to full dimensional patient. Your pictures were neat. Thanks for contributing these thoughts. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. It's always a pleasure to see you. I was particularly touched by your "prayer." I'm a big fan of Maimonides who was committed to the balance of reason and faith. It was so cool to run across someone so knowledgeable about his life and career. As I shared in class, I think it is important for everyone to have a "prayer" (whether religious or not) that helps them get through their daily challenges, and reminds them of what they want their life to be about. One particularly wonderful line is "Grant me the humility to know that I am not the cause nor am I the cure." That sounds exactly like the RamBam. This poem resonated at many, many levels for me. Thank you. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

2ND YEAR PBL SESSION 10/02

Hi --. Hope everything is going well for you this year. I just wanted you to know how much I liked the poem you submitted for the PBL humanities session. It's a beautiful meditation on life, death, and what truly matters at the end of the day. It is mysterious, intricate, and rich. Thanks for a fine poem. Much good luck in finishing up the year. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

--, I'd wanted to write you a note before this regarding your PBL humanities project, but the assignments were misplaced. Thank you for using the assignment to explore something so painful and personal. I was a little confused because of the note at the bottom as to whether you were describing your own situation, or only imagining what it must be like for your classmate. In either case, it shows great empathy and honesty of feeling. I am truly so very sorry that either of you, at such a young age, would have to face this awful circumstance. There is no easy consolation in the face of death, and I have rarely encountered a death that seems "fair." We do the best we can, with prayer, hope, and the love of family and friends. My thoughts and prayers are with your classmate and, if needed, you too. Take good care. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Please accept my apologies for not commenting on your PBL humanities project till now (they were somehow misplaced). You wrote a very touching and poignant essay. I was truly impressed at your ability to enter into the loving, suffering mind of this mother. The courage and devotion of parents always amazes me. Thank you for being willing to approach her pain with such clear-sightedness. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. Please accept my apologies for not commenting earlier on your PBL humanities project (they were misfiled). I liked the way your essay explored the metaphor of having a “broken heart” – very perceptive. As we discussed in class, somatization disorders are frequently encountered in primary care, and it can be difficult and frustrating to care for these patients. It’s important to remember that they are not malingering, or faking, but truly experience themselves as ill. You’ll learn strategies for managing patients like this, but most important is to remember to treat such patients with compassion and respect. Thanks for this essay. Good luck with the rest of the year. Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. I’m sorry for not commenting sooner on your PBL humanities project (the assignments disappeared for awhile). You picked a great topic to explore in your critical incident essay – the idea that a test or a medication will answer all questions and solve all problems, and the insidious way pharmaceutical manufacturers exploit this belief. I’m glad you were exposed to the role-modeling of a wise physician who didn’t succumb to the patient’s desire for (the illusion of) certainty. Thanks for this essay. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. Please accept my apologies for not commenting earlier on your PBL humanities project (they were somehow misplaced). As I mentioned in class, ever since I ran across the term in a British medical journal, I’ve loved the phrase “heartsink.” It is so incredibly human. The preceptor you describe sounds incredibly human. What a great approach to adopt the patient’s voice. As I think you learned, it automatically moves you closer to the patient, who becomes immediately less frustrating, and more understandable. The other teaching examples are so good too, down-to-earth, factual, and compassionate. And of course you’re absolutely right – heartsink is not a word reserved for practicing clinicians, it has plenty of applicability to medical students too! Don’t despair, however; it is usually a passing phenomenon. Thanks for sharing your thoughts, Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. Hope all is going well for you this year. I’d wanted to respond earlier to your PBL humanities assignment, but somehow they were misplaced for awhile. I really liked your point-of-view writing. You demonstrated a good grasp of what this heart patient might be thinking and feeling. For me, it emphasized once again the importance of trust in the doctor-patient relationship. Your preceptor seems an excellent role-model of a kind, understanding, and patient physician who (despite the long lunches) can appreciate and address the differing agendas of husband and wife. Thanks for taking time and care with this essay. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

3RD YEAR PEDIATRICS HUMANITIES PROJECT 3/03

--, ever since I met you in Anatomy orientation, and later the Anatomy of Anatomy panel, I've been impressed with your thoughtfulness, openness, and humanity. Despite the liberties you took with the Jerry Garcia song, my opinion remains unchanged. If Oliver Sacks didn't write those lyrics, he should have! "Tell all the truth, but tell it slant," wrote Emily Dickinson. I believe you did just that. Maybe one day you will sit at the bedside of a patient and play that same song. Thanks very much for bringing a little joy and hope into all our hearts. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. This was a really funny poem, that caught the essence of this kid (both his bravado and his pain) without being either saccharine or angry. The limerick is a great verse form to express pretty deep insights in a humorous and palatable manner. Here you nailed it! Nice work. Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. I really liked your haiku, and I'm glad you included the translation of the Japanese terms because that says it all – mystery and reality, and everything in between. The final haiku in particular was so endearing. I know that traditional haiku choose nature as their focus, and find the same things – mystery, reality, and everything in between. Thanks for making this effort. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

You wrote such a cute poem. Its use of meter and rhyme is really quite skillful, and your choice of alliterative words is just delightful ("crispy coat," "sloppy surprise"). More importantly it captures a wonderful attitude toward the Peds experience – good-tempered, appreciative, slightly bemused. Life is full of lessons, and thank goodness for the ones that come with laughs included. Thanks for this very enjoyable and perceptive poem. Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. I thought you raised a really good issue in your essay. Too often medical students are taught to avoid "countertransference" and identification with patients as somehow contaminating their objectivity. But your essay demonstrates how this emotional openness, accompanied by awareness, can produce great good for both patient and physician. What I particularly appreciated was your ability to acknowledge not only your

little patient's needs, but your own as well. When you are overcome with love for your own child, but are far away, what better use for that emotion than to love those near at hand? Great insight, and one I hope you'll continue to apply. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. Thanks for allowing me to vent a bit about Plexus (ah, it's true, even faculty have feelings ☺). Fortunately, the board meeting went really well, and I think things are going to work out fine. I hope you do decide to participate again next year. The first year students involved seem very conscientious, but I'm sure they'd appreciate additional guidance.

You created some adorable pictures. Of course, kids are so cute, it's hard to mess them up, but you managed to convey the cuteness without being too "treacly." I hope requiring this assignment will encourage you to keep up your art – you are really talented. Take care, and hope we can link up around Plexus next year. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. It's nice to learn you want to go into Pediatrics, since you seem to have such an intuitive feel for what makes kids tick. I happened to show your book to a couple of other faculty members in the teaching session I had following Peds, and they both really enjoyed it. It's funny, touching, and very authentic. Seriously... I hope it adorns your office of the future! Regards, Dr. Shapiro

--, thanks for taking a crack at poetry. I liked what you wrote, it was imaginative and realistic. And I thought we could all learn from your conclusion that "it can feel really good to be get into someone else's shoes." That's exactly the point of these exercises. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Hi --. I thought your Peds humanities project was both cute and creative. I didn't do very well on your little test. It reminded me that developmental milestones are only that – milestones that provide guidance, not prediction. Nice work! Dr. Shapiro

Thanks for the cute idea of chronicling pediatric (non)compliance. I understood those were your kids in the photographs. If so, congratulations on two adorable, but obviously mischievous, little ones. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

--, it was so nice to see you again. I've missed you since the litmed class! Good work on creating some memorable developmental milestones. As I mentioned in class, I especially appreciated the Asian chopstick one. ☺ Thank you also for Groopman's perceptive article on breaking bad news. He is an incredibly thoughtful and humane writer. I hope the rest of the year goes smoothly and well for you. Regards, Dr. Shapiro