

FM REVIEW 2013 29 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: John, I am recommending an immediate major revision on this one, prior to sending it out for review. The essay is very well written, and the topic is a crucial one, to the journal, to the specialty of family medicine, and really to the country. However, I feel the focus is too much on the specific incident of finding gas, and not enough about the actual clinical experiences this student had. I'd like to see an essay that explores how the author's stereotypes were challenged by his **CLINICAL** experiences.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: Dear Mr., this is a well-written, self-deprecatingly humorous piece with a fabulous title that at the same time tackles a serious and crucial issue - i.e., the assumptions and stereotypes many city-dwellers hold of rural America. As such, we are eager to consider it for publication in this journal. However, because this is a journal of family medicine, and because your purpose in going to XX was to complete a rural family medicine rotation, we'd like to see an essay that perhaps uses your search for gas as a jumping off point, but goes on to discuss some aspect of your clinical experiences as well, and how these informed and nuanced the original beliefs and expectations you might have held. We understand that the "looking for gas" is symbolic, and indeed it is an amusing story resonant with meaning. Nevertheless, we'd like to see you shorten it up into an attention-catching introduction, then share something about the clinical aspect of your experience as well and how that has affected your attitudes toward rural medicine as a future physician.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: I am sending this back to the drawing board. It does have some merit, especially as a window into the reactions to a rural rotation from a student from a very suburban background. It has a kind of callow humor that can be endearing. I agree strongly with all the criticisms of the two excellent reviews (especially Dr.XX), and have tried to underline their main points in my comments to author. In addition, I'm attaching an edited manuscript that should help him see where he needs to rein in his hyperbolic jokiness.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for this revision, we believe you are on the right track. However, more work needs to be done to make this a publishable piece. Fortunately, you have received two very helpful reviews which should guide your effort. Please pay close attention to these and follow their recommendations. In addition to minor (but excellent) specific suggestions for rewriting and correcting grammatical errors, there are two main points to keep in mind:

- 1) As reviewer 2 notes, although you are a good writer, your efforts at humor sometimes come across as too extreme and exaggerated. Please think seriously about how you can keep the same light tone but exercise a more subtle touch. Rather than talking about x and y, think about the actual stereotypes you REALLY held, and how you can poke fun at them.**
- 2) Reviewer 1 notes that your main point should be YOUR OWN GROWTH as a result of this rural rotation. Therefore, please try to highlight what you've learned from this experience, how it's affected you, and how you've changed, how your mistaken assumptions have been challenged. As reviewer 1 notes, in order to help us understand this growth, you**

need to be **SPECIFIC** about what your original biases were. This point goes back to the above point about exaggerated humor. Instead of these silly (although funny) examples, show us more about what your real stereotypes were. You do this well in terms of your physician role models; but I suspect there were other influences that changed your view of rural communities as well. You can be funny, but take the risk to be a little vulnerable as well, and show the reader more of yourself.

One small but confusing point. You describe the gas incident as occurring while you are driving **BACK** to your rural rotation. If you've already spent time in this rural community, why do you have all of these fears and prejudices? I thought the point of the essay was to show how your experience in the community freed you from your mistaken assumptions. Please clarify this point.

I've included a lightly edited version of your paper that points out areas where you should modulate your humor, and look for examples closer to actual stereotypes you might have endorsed.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR III: This essay is improving, and is moving closer to acceptance once it addresses an ongoing lack of integration between the introduction and the rest of the essay (see below). In addition, there continue to be a few awkwardly turned phrasings, for which I offer suggestions. I don't think the author has entirely succeeded in identifying his own prejudices and assumptions, but on the whole the essay employs less sophomoric humor (while still retaining amusing hyperbole) and successfully charts this student's journey toward greater understanding and respect for rural communities and rural medicine.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III; Thank you for these thoughtful revisions. You are really a good writer ("tractor-pulled from my mind" is a wonderful phrase), you just need to learn to rein yourself in a bit.

There seem to be two parts to your essay, and I'm still struggling with how to fit them together. The first involving the gas anecdote seems intended to show (in exaggerated form) your mistrust and stereotyping of a rural community, and how an act of neighborliness helped dispel your bias. The second is an encomium to the doctors Bunch, and how they opened your eyes about the valuable role of family practice. These are both worthwhile points, but you need to do a better job of tying them together.

How? Look at p. 3, line 32 to create some kind of bridge between the two. For example, you might say something to the effect, "My late night flirtation with an empty gas tank made me realize some of the assumptions and prejudices about rural communities I had brought with me to Othello. I also realized my experience there shed light on the wrestling I'd done about the role of family physicians..." Then, in your final paragraph, make reference not only to "warming up" to the community (which might inadvertently come across as a little patronizing), but acknowledging how your own views about rural communities had become more respectful and nuanced.

In addition, there are a few stylistic awkwardnesses in the second half of the essay that should be addressed:

1) p. 3, lines 47-49 "providing depth of care..." Please consider changing to "providing the breadth and depth of care characteristic of trained family physicians."

2) p. 4 line 35 Consider substituting "translate" for "go over" (too colloquial)

3) p. 4 lines 50-52 "physicians I had encountered..." Consider this wording instead: "...many physicians I had encountered struck me [or impressed me unfavorably] as rather pompous, remote [other possible adjectives: critical, aloof, detached] authority figures parding in white coats. However, in addition to his quick intelligence [or something that acknowledges his intellectual acumen], this man had an empathetic heart..."

4) p. 5 line 4 - "prophylaxis for burnout sensitive physicians" is a nice phrase, but I think you mean "burned-out" or burnt-out"? And do you mean Dr. B is a model for how sensitive physicians can avoid burn-out? Make sure this phrase is saying what you want it to.

Please make these corrections. More importantly, figure out a way to unify the essay into a coherent whole. Then you will have achieved something of real value in this piece.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR IV: The author has worked conscientiously to satisfy my and reviewers' concerns. This version of the manuscript adequately reflects these efforts. It is time to move forward with this piece. I recommend acceptance.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR IV: Thank you for these revisions. You've done a much better job of linking together the two themes of your paper, and I think the transition from rural stereotypes to celebrating your physician mentors now proceeds more smoothly. We enjoyed this insightful and humorous account of training in a rural community.