

## REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY

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Commencement Ceremony, 05/15/2010

...Is there a doctor in the house? Oh, Class of 2010... We finally made it. I want to start by congratulating my class and thanking the faculty, friends and families who gathered here today to recognize the FSU College of Medicine's graduating Class of 2010. Before I go any further, I am required to disclose that this speech, as many parts of our medical training, is co-sponsored by the Geriatrics Foundation and if any members of the Class of 2010 are still considering a career in gerontology, they are eligible for a complimentary massage at the conclusion of the ceremony.

It is a great honor for me to address my class at the culmination of our medical school training. I have to admit that deciding the subject of my departing words was a difficult task, as med school represents a variety of emotions, ideas and concepts to the individual members of the Class of 2010. For some, it was analogous to hiking the Appalachian Trail, finishing a long, rigid, intellectual journey. For others, it was a lesson in humility and the fragility of the human body and mind. But late last night, when I sat down to begin writing this speech, in true med school fashion, with hands trembling from a triple shot of espresso in the fluorescent lighting of the basement study room in the COM main building that the Class of 2010 knows as "the dungeon," it occurred to me that medical school is a relationship.

I'm not talking about the doctor-patient relationship or the peer-to-peer relationship. My intent today is to briefly clarify and explain to our friends and families what exactly has been keeping us from remembering birthdays, going on family vacations, answering phone calls or having the grandchildren you've expected us to have by now. Yes, your sons and daughters were caught up in a "summer fling" that started in 2006 and has lasted four years.

Now every relationship has its beginning, and the Class of 2010/COM relationship started four and a half years ago with the application process. Imagine one of those old-time, tete-a-tete, Southern kissing benches with the Class of 2010 on one side and on the other, the COM, represented by none other than the Dean of Student Affairs, Dr. Peter Eveland. Was it his Southern charm ... or perhaps his desire to serve elder, rural and minority populations that made the Class of 2010 feel comfortable being who we were? He asked us deep, probing questions such as, "Are you from Florida?" and "What specialty do you intend on practicing in when you are done ... perhaps Family Medicine ... in Florida?" We had such a good time that before we knew it we arrived at our orientation in May of 2006, or as I will call it our "second date."

At orientation, the COM was cautious and asked us to fill out some forms about our interests and hobbies. And without notice, took some candid, portrait photographs. Little did we know that those photos and forms were turned into a display to be sent to every single clinical rotation in our third and fourth years. Yes, every patient I saw learned that the student they were about to see enjoyed playing Ultimate Frisbee and played bass in a local college band. They were surprised when Jerry Garcia didn't walk into the room. The COM courted us with gifts, like lightning-fast tablet-computers complete with stylish, turtle-shell backpacks.

Before we knew it, orientation was over and the Class of 2010 was eagerly awaiting med school's start. Dr. Andrew Payer, professor of anatomy, swung by, his pet parrot on his shoulder, and picked us up in a trolley car for a tour of the human anatomy. As we ooched along, learning the basic

blocking and tackling, in his own words he “opened up the fire hose of knowledge” on us and we were to “act like sponges, soaking it all up.” He called us by enduring pet names like “the Pink Panther,” referring to Jim Boron's pink shorts, and “the Bean Counter,” referring to Marc Gutierrez, who zealously kept track of anatomy details.

Meanwhile, members of the Class of 2010 were practicing their history-taking and physical exam skills with simulators and standardized patients under close video surveillance in the Clinical Learning Center. Under the careful eyes of Dr. Lisa Granville, we would be tested on complicated medical subjects like the proper spelling of the word “sphygmomanometer.” After three months, it was official: The Class of 2010 and the COM were going steady. This was made clear at our white coat ceremony – a promise ring, if you will.

In the time to come, the COM revealed its true personalities. Dr. Mike Overton taught us that while most of human physiology is inherently obvious, when in doubt ... well ... you can always be vague. Mmmkay. Dr. Charles Ouimet, neuroanatomist, explored the mysteries of the mind and found simple ways for us to remember rare neurological conditions, like Penny's Disease, named after the famous Dr. Penny. Because FSU is in the South, the COM saw fit to educate the Class of 2010 in proper etiquette and Southern vernacular. Thanks to Dr. Jake VanLandingham we understood proper conjugation and uses of words like “Legend,” “Brother,” “Joker” and “Rube.” Dr. Ryerson found creative ways to keep our attention, often stomping his yardstick and singing songs like, “30-60-60-90-40-75,” describing the oxygen-hemoglobin dissociation curve. And then there was Dr. Klatt ... whose departure remains my fondest memory of Tallahassee, being swaddled in his awkward embrace. Yes, this romance was in its “golden years” and the COM wooed our Class with pearls of wisdom handed down through its faculty.

After two years, the relationship became more one-on-one as the class began working with individual COM preceptors in the communities of Florida. Hand in hand, we tried the basic medical specialties, honing our skills, deciding where our relationship was headed and if we had what it takes to get to the next level. In OB/GYN we shared the joys of a new life, and if the families are wondering, those long hours of joy are why we are not having kids. Pediatrics was a trial by fire, and a passing grade was only given to the student after he/she had been pooped, peed and vomited on. On Psychiatry, we diagnosed our patients, ourselves and all of you in the room with various mental disorders. Family and Internal Medicine turned us into hypochondriacs. Every cough, headache and change in bowel movement became a self-diagnosed terminal illness.

Our clinical years were filled with insight and new experiences. As with many relationships, as we grew together we grew apart. The COM wasn't upset about this; in fact, it encouraged us to test the waters, so to speak. Our final year was filled with travels, interviews and externships. We signed up for an online dating service to help us find that “perfect match,” and when it was all said and done, we found someone else to continue the relationship and journey that we started with FSU.

As you can all see, your sons, daughter, brothers, sisters or friends in the Class of 2010 are not the same people we were four years ago. The experiences in our medical training changed us. Made us stronger, smarter and more humble. My only parting words to my class will be to look around the room and honor the family and friends who supported us, our teachers and colleagues who labored, walked and laughed with us and to look to your future with a *bright* and *funny* optimism. Thank you and congratulations.