Life in 55 Words

Submissions for this special column were required to meet the following basic criteria: Relate—in exactly 55 words (not including the title)—an experience that influenced the author or author’s practice of medicine. Submissions reflected a wide range of experiences and emotions.

(Fam Med 2011;43(2):123-4.)

Take Care of Your Mother
“Doctor, take care of your mother. I lost mine one month ago and now, I am missing her.”
I thought about my job as a doctor. Always counseling everybody and many times forgetting that my life and my family's life are as vulnerable as anyone's. I kept that counseling from my patient in my heart.
Marco Aurélio Janaudis, MD
SOBRAMFA (Brazilian Society of Family Medicine)

Never Alone
Captivated by the harmony, I sat outside the old man’s room. Generations filled it with their voices, summoned by the sons who had carried the patriarch in on a chair three days earlier. After midnight, the family filed out, all 17. “We’re just helping Grandpa cross over.” I entered and stayed until the journey's end.
William R. Phillips, MD, MPH
University of Washington

Priest
I'm not a Catholic priest wearing black robes. I wear a white coat. I've learned that behind every exam door lays the only confession booth some people have. Behind the exam room door many bare their souls to me, their physician, and they find peace and forgiveness for themselves, knowing that nothing leaves the room.
Benjamin J. Ingram, MD
Dewitt Army Community Hospital
Ft. Belvoir, VA

Scarred
A scarred face in the exam room. She is blind. The story of acid burns, yet so beautiful inside. We learn from her kindness. I develop a beautiful relationship with her. Then I change my job. She is a treasure I have lost. Need to find her. I have learned life's lessons from her.
Sweety Jain, MD
Lehigh Valley Family Medicine Residency Program
Allentown, PA

Hospice
Sometimes.
I can’t change the outcome.
Bad things happen.
Masses grow
Lungs stiffen
Hearts soften
And people die.
Everyone does.
Even when I’ve tried
Really hard.
To postpone such discussions
My role eventually becomes
Nurturing.
To make your body comfortable
To help you sleep
To calm your fears.
As I say goodbye
To a friend.
Andrea Wendling, MD
Michigan State University College of Human Medicine

Experience
Two high-risk children. The mom, just 13, working the streets, living chaos complicated by heroin and spirochetes. Yet, she cared for her new baby with confidence. She met my doubts with folded arms: “Who do you think took care of all those babies my five older sisters had? My Mama and me.” Hard-earned experience.
William R. Phillips, MD, MPH
University of Washington
**Why I’m a Family Doc**

Second-year community preceptorship:
4 pm: Rush to Emergency. See my first patient die
Looked in our eyes, pleading “Help me.”
I don’t even know her. Why am I crying?
4 am: Rush to L&D. Deliver my first baby
Erin or Aaron, clumsy delivery,
But what a rush!
Death to life.
Family practice for me.

_Nancy C. Elder, MD, MSPH
University of Cincinnati_

**Fibromyalgia**

A peregrination
From doctor to doctor.
Too many exams,
No real cause.

Maybe a fibromyalgia—someone said.
The question is—my body still aches,
A deep pain, I always feel,
That is coming from inside.

And now you show me

The only thing I need is
To heal my soul’s wounds
Before being totally cured.

_Maria Auxiliadora Craice De Benedetto, MD
SOBRAMFA (Brazilian Society of Family Medicine)_

**The Spinner**

Girl in first grade.
Sore some more. Lunch on the floor. Mop spins. Another day.

_Monique R. Mills, MD
University of Texas Health Center at Tyler_

**Teaching**

“My gestational diabetic patient records ‘perfect’ sugar levels. What more can a home visit do?” states my resident. At the patient’s home, her glucometer reads 118, but she logs 95. Why 95? Patient responds, “To remind me what it should be.” Resident sighs, embarrassed and humbled. He now understands. Home visits: More impact. Better partnership.

_Anthony Zamudio, PhD
Family Medicine Residency Program at
California Hospital
Los Angeles_

**School of Hard Knocks**

Office: 28 weeks. Signs of preterm labor discussed.
Checklist meticulously completed.

Home: 32 weeks. Painful, hard contractions for 8 hours.
In bed, alone, silent, nighttime.

Hospital: 6 centimeters dilated. Too late.


Physician: Despite my organization and attention to detail, challenging outcome. Family medicine should include instructions for conscientious caregivers.

_Richard W. Pretorius, MD, MPH
Wright State University_