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She Whose Words Helped Me to See

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Cover Page Footnote

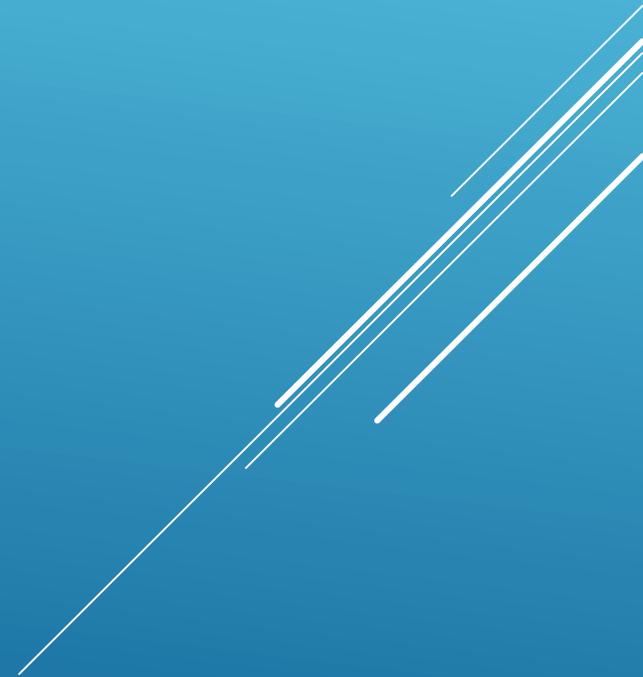
This piece is dedicated to my sister, Shanna, who chooses to live every day with grace. There is no more extraordinary role model, and I will continue to be thankful every day for being granted the gift of being your sister.

TARA MCKENNA:

AUTHORS STATEMENT:

THIS ESSAY IS A REFLECTION ON THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF TEACHERS AND PHYSICIAN HEALERS. IT IDENTIFIES LESSONS THAT PHYSICIANS CAN LEARN FROM EDUCATORS IN OUR LIVES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATING THESE TOOLS WITH PATIENTS.

THIS PIECE IS DEDICATED TO MY SISTER, SHANNA, WHO CHOOSES TO LIVE EVERY DAY WITH GRACE. THERE IS NO MORE EXTRAORDINARY ROLE MODEL, AND I WILL CONTINUE TO BE THANKFUL EVERY DAY FOR BEING GRANTED THE GIFT OF BEING YOUR SISTER.



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In my eyes, teaching and medicine have always been rooted in the same thing: one person helping another person, or people, learn something that we, as a greater society, have deemed important. While the information contained in that important 'something' differs significantly between subjects, (for example, the content in a second-grade classroom lesson compared to the delivery of critical medical results), much of what goes into the communication in this exchange of information stems from similar roots--- meeting the needs of the learner in your delivery.

My younger sister has always been my inspiration and my idol. Her wisdom is shocking - groundbreaking even - given her age. She is thoughtful, reflective, and curious, and her demeanor is professional, with a touch of sweetness that is intrinsic to every new teacher. Her dream is to teach a second-grade class and perhaps go on to become a school district superintendent. My dream? That my future unborn children could ever be so lucky to be sculpted by a teacher like her.

My awakening moment occurred four years ago in the summertime. My sister and I stopped at a local smoothie store after a workout. We ordered and waited and saw a man collecting his order. He saw the drinks, sighed, and explained that he was unaware the second smoothie would be green and that his young child would turn it away because of the color. The owner (whose daughters are employees) chuckled and gladly began to prepare him a new, non-green smoothie. Unbeknownst to me, an epiphany was about to unfold.

A thought slowly accumulated in my mind, like the swirling ingredients coming together in the blender before me. I looked at my sister, who also heard the man's conversation and said; 'Kids are so funny. I would have told him that the drink contains nutrients that will help you grow big and strong. Green things can make you healthy and happy because they have special molecules in them.' My nonexistent experience with children was showing to an embarrassing degree. My sister looked at me sweetly but with a simplicity that made it seem strikingly obvious and said, 'Tara, you tell them a Leprechaun made it!'

I was shell-shocked. In a sentence, my sister revealed so many years of her learned experience. While I have tried to understand what she does every day when she prepares her lesson plans, studies for her licensing exams, and has meetings with field instructors to refine her skills, I have never seen her in action until now. My mind, which has become acclimated to and almost robotically accustomed to things like medical jargon and chemical pathways swirling through my brain, forgot about an inherent, fundamental goal of becoming a physician--- accumulating and mastering knowledge so that I can communicate and match my delivery in a way that meets the needs of the learner-- my patients.

My sister is my inspiration and has impacted every child who has come into her path. She sparks light and joy in everyone who has known or will know her, and I aim to be one of her most loyal students by continuing to learn from her. She is what makes me strive to be the best physician, teacher, and, someday, mother that I can be. My plea is to embrace the teachers in your lives. Respect their knowledge, respect their sacrifices, and take a few leaves out of their books.

Tara McKenna is a first-year medical student at KPCOM.

“My journey to becoming a physician has been arduous and, at times, seemingly impossible. Yet, I am here today because I want to help make my future patients feel seen and heard during their most vulnerable moments. This is the first artistic work that I have ever written and submitted. Nevertheless, it felt like the perfect opportunity to express my passion and gratitude for the teachers who have touched my life”

She graduated from the University of Delaware in 2019 with a B.S. in Medical Diagnostics and a minor in Art History. She received her M.S. in Physiology and Biophysics in 2020 from Georgetown University.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR