

## 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.

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### 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.

*Sweetie 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

Long hair curls. Brown eyes shine. Playground spins.  
 Girl in first grade.  
 Child cries. Teacher calls. Parent spins. No school today.  
 Belly aches. Temperature climbs. Head spins. Appointment made.  
 History guides. Exam confirms. Lab spins. Equivocate.  
 Sore some more. Lunch on the floor. Mop spins. Another day.  
 Long night frightens. Intern knows. Scanner spins. Operate.

*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.

Patient: Unaware. Naïve. Hopeful. Trusting. Calm.

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*