



## 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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### Still of the Night

Just the doctor on-call for OB, I did what I could. The night was long and the labor hard. Mourning came before daybreak. Months later at the mall, we recognized each other, clothed for the first time. "Thank you for taking care of our little Ryan. We can try again next year, Dr Mackenzie says."

*William R. Phillips, MD, MPH*  
Department of Family Medicine  
University of Washington

### 103

103. Boy he's old! Still kicking, laughing. Still quite bold. Telling stories of a world before I was born. Before electricity or cars, he weathered storms. Illuminating times long past, a living history lesson. With mirthful eyes he says the time goes fast. Tells me to cherish each day no matter how long you last.

*Peter J. Koopman, MD*  
Department of Family and Community Medicine  
University of Missouri-Columbia

### A New Life

"Doc, come quick. She's complete!" "Push, mom, 1,2,3,..." "Please notify the attending we have a delivery." "Push, 7,8..." Heart tones down. "Mom, you have to help me get this baby out! Nurse, call again." Vacuum fails. Manuevers fail. Heart tones still down. Years seem to pass! All in a blur, baby cries! I too, cry.

*Vibhuti Ansar, MD*  
The Medical Center Family Medicine Residency  
Columbus, GA

### Eight Years of Meetings

Eight years of meetings and trying to get it right. "Stop smoking." "Lose weight." "Check your sugar." Waiting for me in the exam room amounts to hours of precious time. Now, it seems for naught. Neither of us saw the cancer that took you swiftly away from your devoted family at the age of 52. I'm sorry.

*Denise Cogle, DO*  
Central Maine Medical Center

### Determination: Recurrent AB

The test is positive.  
Some fear, more joy.  
Old life wraps around new.

Foretelling, dreaming,  
Mapping dates  
Within days of knowing.

Echoing heartbeats  
Fluttering feet  
Cautiously dancing.

Then the girl.  
Screams. Into my world  
Demanding  
Her attention. Banishing ghosts with beautiful life.  
Quickly. The survey.  
Hands, feet.  
We're here. Together.  
Beautiful miracle.

To trust again.  
*Andrea Wendling, MD*  
Michigan State University College of Human Medicine

### Dr in the D.R.

Red and purple mountains bake under the hot Dominican sun. Motorbikes dodge buses, and goats. The dusty bus ride takes three hours. Rhythmic Latin music pours from brightly painted cinderblock shacks, in passing barrios. "Americano, Americano," is the shouted greeting from the remote boy's orphanage. A sea of smiling brown faces. Our medical mission unfolds.

*Michael Flanagan, MD*  
Penn State Hershey College of Medicine

**Cancer**

Diagnosis metastatic colon cancer  
 Six months of chemo—smells like death  
 Five hours of surgery—feels like hell

Thought we were special  
 Thought we were blessed  
 Thought we got lucky

Cancer, you are back, you fiend  
 Can't you just leave us alone?  
 Fear, anger, anguish, sadness—we feel.  
 Faith, hope, trust, love—we implore.

**Prognosis?**

*Olivia Ojano-Sheehan, PhD*  
*Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine /*  
*Centers for Osteopathic Research and Education*

**Pointless**

Operating on a severely disabled adult just to afford a few more months or years of meaningless existence. “I would never do that!” the senior surgical resident fumed. He didn't realize, of course, that my severely disabled sister is precious to me. An elegant reminder to myself to reserve judgment on the choices my patients make.

*Jennifer Frank, MD*  
*University of Wisconsin*

**ALS**

“My ski poles are getting too heavy to hold...”  
 Vigorous, seventy, perplexed by unexpected weakness.

Five tumbling months, crush time,  
 following those final days of sun and powder.  
 Spare, shuddering breaths fade,  
 as predawn August gray sifts through tilted bedroom  
 blinds.

Life's richness swept away,  
 Did he, like Mr Gehrig at Yankee Stadium, feel lucky?

*Osman N. Sanyer, MD*  
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