


Since I was a child, I had wanted to be a family doctor. And there were many reasons. But it wasn't until the moment when I stood inside Mrs Stewart's living room that I realized *the* reason. I wanted to give my patients the sense of comfort this doctor was giving Mrs Stewart, the same comfort that I believed I was giving my great-grandmother many years ago.

### Through the good and bad

During the course of my medical training, it has become abundantly clear that family physicians are best suited to this type of primary care. Well-crafted buzzwords like *physician-patient relationship* don't adequately describe the connection between family doctor and patient. It's the family doctor who has known the patient for years and decades. It's the family doctor who knows the whole family. It's the family doctor who, in a sense, becomes part of the family. And it's the family doctor who is there for the patient through the good and the bad, who is a source of advice and comfort. That's why I went into medicine, and that's why I want to become a family doctor.

So, whatever became of the toy doctor's kit that my great-grandmother had given me so long ago? It's sitting on a bookshelf in my bedroom. Whenever I look at my toy doctor's kit, I'm reminded of my first house-call and what medicine really means to me. Medicine is much more than diagnoses, laboratory values, and medications. Medicine is a vehicle through which all of us are able to touch and make a positive difference in the lives of others, and nothing in life is more important than that. 

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### Competing interests

*None declared*

This story was collected as part of the Heartbeat of Family Medicine project of the College of Family Physicians of Canada. An exciting new program called History and Narrative: Stories in Family Medicine will be launched at Family Medicine Forum 2007 in Winnipeg, Man, this fall. Please send your stories by e-mail to **Inese Grava-Gubins** at [igg@cfpc.ca](mailto:igg@cfpc.ca) or by mail to History and Narrative: Stories in Family Medicine, College of Family Physicians of Canada, c/o Research Department, 2630 Skymark Ave, Mississauga, ON L4W 5A4.

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Storytelling through poetry and song can be an effective healing tool. These song lyrics illustrate the use of imagery and metaphor to provide support and inspiration.

## Courage

*Courage is not the absence of fear,  
but the taking of action despite fear.*

Half awake she stretched herself, her hand went to her chest  
where just a week ago there used to be another breast  
but in its place was empty space, just skin beneath her hand  
and a change in her self-image that she did not understand.

The doctors said it had to go, there was no other way  
to have a chance to laugh and dance at her daughter's next birthday  
the cancer an aggressive one and she so very young  
so many stories left to write, so many songs unsung.

So she said yes, they booked a date, though fear was in her heart  
for this was just the first of many treatments that would start  
her friends told tales of courage, but fear was all that she could see  
for even with an absent breast life gives no guarantee.

What life may bring, we do not choose; how we act is our choice  
and part of healing is to speak, to give our pain a voice  
for courage is not lack of fear, but singing out despite  
and living's more than dodging death, it's singing through the night.

A fine scar on her gentle skin...a wound within her soul  
she hadn't planned to think of death till she was very old  
but as she rose to dress herself and face another day  
she thought perhaps she'd start to sing and heal herself this way.

Now quite awake she stretched herself, her hand went to her chest  
where in another life, there used to be another breast  
now in its place just empty space, just skin beneath her hand  
and a change in her self-image she did not yet understand.

— Ros Schwartz

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