

que le travail de la soirée était terminé.

Le lendemain matin, les murs du couloir répercutaient le martèlement pressé de mes bottes qui rappelait une marche militaire. Pensant au travail qu'il y aurait à faire, je marchais toujours comme ça le matin. Je suis arrivé au bureau de l'unité, me demandant comment sa nuit s'était passée. J'ai cherché son dossier dans le casier sans le trouver. Il devrait être juste ici. Je regardais plutôt un espace vide.

« Elle est morte durant la nuit », a dit son infirmière derrière moi sur un ton entendu. Elle devait être arrivée pendant que je cherchais le dossier. Je me suis retourné pour la regarder au moment où elle ajoutait par réflexe « Je suis désolée ». Chacun de ses mots a fait son chemin jusqu'à mon cerveau.

Cinq mois de souvenirs ont déferlé sur moi, tel un tsunami. D'un seul coup, dans une intense clarté, le parcours tortueux de ce voyage rempli de rires, de larmes, de sourires et de craintes s'est déroulé dans ma tête. Ma première patiente venait de mourir. Ma patiente. Un

tourbillon incontrôlable, où se mêlaient tous les regards échangés, les sourires partagés et les mots prononcés, m'a englouti puis abandonné, plus solitaire que jamais. Quand je suis arrivé ce matin, je pensais créer avec elle un autre moment de vie. Quand je suis arrivé ce matin, elle n'était plus là.

Je suis resté figé sur place, en état de choc, prisonnier du souvenir de sa grâce tranquille et de mon sentiment de culpabilité. Je suis resté figé sur place, avec deux mots à peine audibles qui résonnaient dans le vide de mon désespoir silencieux. Deux mots à peine audibles ...

« Merci bien », avait-elle dit. Pour elle, le simple fait de couper ce vilain bout de bracelet avait fait toute la différence. Ce tout petit geste avait assuré son confort. Je pensais qu'il n'avait aucune importance, mais il aura été la toute dernière chose que j'aurai faite pour elle.

« Merci bien. » En fin de compte, c'est ce qui importait le plus.

*Dr Kmet* est un résident. Il termine actuellement une année de compétences avancées en anesthésiologie pour la pratique de la médecine familiale à Calgary en Alberta.



*Best French story by a family physician*

## Thanks, Dad

**Catherine Hudon MD PhD CCMF**

When I grow up, I'm going to be a doctor just like my dad!" That was the nascent Hippocratic oath I declared with the imaginative spirit of a 5-year-old girl. My father, larger than life, good natured and gifted with legendary devotion to his profession, fostered my deepest admiration. It was impossible to remain unaffected by his contagious passion, unmoved by his affective experiences, or untouched by his exhilarating tales. Just recently a rowdy drunk had confronted him in an emergency room downtown. A lucid centenarian moved him by sharing her extraordinary life story. While listening to the epic tales of his daily life, a profound respect and sincere affection toward the characters emerged within me.

Despite the busy days and the guards who frequently prowled the halls, my father always seemed ready to respond to the call of duty. Whether adjusting the sedative dose for a nun in the terminal phase of her illness, or meeting with the family of an agitated octogenarian, he was always the man for the job. How fulfilling! What a wild and exciting existence! What privileged moments with so many diverse and unique people! I could not

wait to live such a life, or to help so many interesting people. Driven by naïve determination, one thing became evident to me; that I would one day become a family doctor.

I stayed the course up until my teenaged years, inspired by my admiration for my very first hero. Over time, as I experienced more of the world, I discovered new interests that might have otherwise tempted me, but I remained faithful to my first passion. Little by little, the formation of my own identity merged with more personal motivations. I no longer wanted to become a family doctor merely to imitate my father, but instead out of the desire to attain my own accomplishments. In a familiar fashion, I yearned to take on a role that would be mine. Then, after so many years of dreaming, my fantasy started to transform into reality, and I would begin studying medicine.

Over the course of my studies, I grew from the passive role of admiring spectator, to developing my own opinion. I began to question things, dismayed by the fact that my mentor sometimes shared my doubts. Countless nights were spent debating the superiority of evidence over lived experience! My father, who once inspired awe, now struggled to sway my opinion. Were an overdose of assertion and a hint of conviction the necessary recipe for success on my journey down the path of medicine? My spirit encumbered by an abundance of new knowledge, I found that the opening lines of my saga

La version française de cet article se trouve à [www.cfp.ca](http://www.cfp.ca) dans la table des matières du numéro de janvier 2014 à la page 71.

took on a far different tone than the beloved epics of my childhood.

Then one day, after many years of hard work, and armed with new evidence and the latest in scientific knowledge, I was finally ready to stand on my own 2 feet. I now had to be available day and night during weeks of on-call duty. It was my turn to reassure anxious families, to discover the feeling of helplessness when faced with the first unexpected death. I remember fondly now the inquisitive looks of some of my patients who, upon learning that I was their new doctor, struggled to discern my age. Meanwhile bolder patients would surprise me by asking me the question outright. Despite being filled with determination and enthusiasm, I still required practice before becoming accustomed to my new role. Back in those days, more than a sliver of pride prevented me from admitting that my predecessor's shoes were proving tougher to fill than anticipated!

Time progressed and various actors entered the script, generously guiding me in cultivating new skills. I learned immensely from those encounters, from each individual living out their own story. A young mother in the twilight of her life returns to basics at a hospice for palliative care. A well-intentioned man suffering from anxiety had discovered the soothing effects of alcohol, and now attempted to rid himself of his dependency. A resilient old woman confided in me about her

long journey in coming to peace with a difficult past. Over time I became increasingly aware that these people were the true headliners of the story. I could remove my costume and resign myself to the shadows of the projector. I was, in actuality, but a humble companion in the narratives of their lives, just as my father before me. It is difficult to admit, but my childlike gaze and admiration had inadvertently obscured the identity of the real heroes.

I've been a participant in this play of life for 15 years now. Over the course of those years other mentors have enlightened me to various views on family medicine, and I have learned as much from them as I have from education and research. I appreciate the range of atmospheres created by these intermingling myriad perspectives. Yet these lessons only possess meaning when the true heroes are acknowledged; those who assign purpose—the sheer *raison d'être*—to the story. As time passes, I've become increasingly appreciative and accepting of my role, and far more capable of acknowledging the one who led me to discover it. It is now with full comprehension, life experience, and great humility that I continue to hold such deep admiration for him.

Thanks, Dad.



**Dr Hudon** is Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Sherbrooke in Quebec.

