

When you're feeling alone, remember **you are loved.**
 When you're feeling hopeless, remember **you are strong.**
 When you're feeling lost, remember **you will find your way.**

Kaylee Dykstal, M2

Photo credit: @CreightonAlumni on Twitter

Halfway

Lily Foley, M3

On the first day of medical school, I turned to my roommate as we walked to campus from our apartment and said, "I just want to be an M3."

A part of me could not help but feel anxious. We had worked hard to receive acceptance letters into medical school with hopes of working with patients, understanding complex disease processes, and making differences in the lives of others. As I walked into my first lecture as an M1, those hopes seemed like a far cry from our reality.

As I began the many long days (yet seemingly short weeks) that followed, it became apparent just how premature that statement was. I knew nothing about what being a third-year medical student on clinical rotations entailed. I also had no idea, at the start of M1 year, how grueling, difficult, but equally rewarding the preclinical years would be for me.

When the start of M3 year came along, I was ready. Ready to put my First Aid book to rest; ready to be involved with patient care; ready to observe physicians in their realm of expertise; and ready to find my place in the broad field of medicine. Now, halfway through the twelve months of clerkships, was it all I imagined it would be as a naïve first-year student?

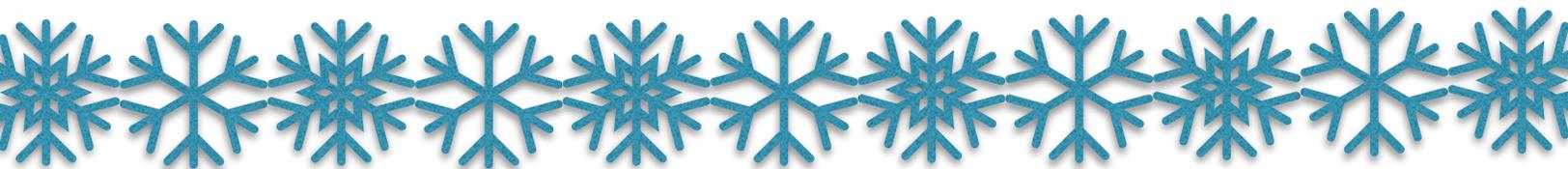
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With my own Step date a mere four months away, I have had some time to think about how I want to approach my studying. Like many people, I used to be overly concerned about being a certain weight and looking a certain way. I remember trying out a few very weird diets and doing ab routines that promised a six pack in two weeks. All this did was make me more unhappy and disappointed.

As I've grown older, I have learned to develop a much healthier relationship with food and exercise. I have realized how every individual has their own unique body and while one thing may work for one person, it may not work for another. I have learned the beauty of balance. Initial discipline has led to the formation of good habits. I actually *enjoy* eating Brussels sprouts now, and I work out regularly because it makes me feel energized. But when I do see the Berry Chantilly cake at Whole Foods, I buy it. And if my body is exhausted, I listen to it and don't beat myself up about not exercising that day.

Just as with my diet, I used to be obsessed with how my peers were studying and what resources other people were using. This led to even more stress, something that is abundant enough in med school. Admittedly, I still sometimes find myself getting caught up in this. But over the past year and a half, I have developed my own study habits and found my favorite resources. I try not to let the staggering amount of study tools -- diets if you will -- deter me from what I know works for me. And the beauty of balance applies here, too. Over the years, my strict studying regimen has led to the task feeling as natural as driving a car. But when I do feel my eyes straining and my mind tiring, I do not hesitate to take a break. For me, this has been getting outside on the tennis court, baking banana bread, or having a glass of wine with my friends. So, my fellow M2s, as we gear up for Step, let us not forget to eat our vegetables vehemently, have our cake guilt-free, and not worry about all the crazy fad diets that promise a shortcut to success.



Comings and Goings

Laura Tarantino, M3

Half past midnight in the hospital
And the old saxophone recording plays overhead:
Go to sleep, go to sleep, little baby
Which is a reminder that:
A few floors away
Where the lights are bright,
A tiny bundle is being vigorously rubbed dry.
There are hands gently placing a stethoscope
To hear a low fluttering sound,
And there are tightly clenched eyes
And an open mouth that finally lets out
A reassuring wail that floods the room with joy.

Half past midnight in the hospital and
Where the lights are dimmed
There is an elderly woman amid a sea of white blankets.
There is a son, a daughter, a grandson that holds her hand.
There are clenched eyes and an open mouth.
She is breathing slowly,
Slowly
And then not at all.
There are hands gently placing a stethoscope
To hear the silence
That comes at the end of a long journey.

learning the body

pooja varman, M3

feels like taking a colored pencil
to a blank sheet of paper. you
start somewhere, spread gradually
across the page, revisit each area
with new angles and pressures
each day

feels like chopping an onion
from root to stem. left is right
and right is left
to watch you weep
before a bulbous body, beget a breath
that stings your eyelids. wipe this
ocean from your shores — the body
sleeps like a fistful of wet sand
with no choice but to comply

someday, they will decide
your paper is full enough
and vibrant enough, that you have performed
the right strokes and will remember them.
and they will give you permission
to walk along this holy beach
and cull buried shells until salty air
entangles their laughter
— permission to heal



Photo credit: ignatianspirituality.com

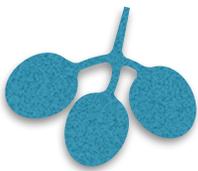
Over the course of the pandemic, we have all learned to grow in our individual ways. We have fought physical, mental, and emotional barriers to our health, some all at the same time. Throughout this time of global vulnerability, I attempted to grow and become stronger as an individual.

The first and potentially most difficult barrier I faced was physical. As businesses closed down, my usual routine of going to the gym was transformed into some rusty old weights, a tethered jump rope, and a torn yoga mat in my parents' garage. I had been stripped of what felt like my only escape from the medical school environment. Physically I felt restless, but mentally I felt deprived of one of the few things keeping me sane. I learned to adapt and create makeshift programs with the equipment I had, took up yoga, and learned to relieve physical stress in a new way. I discovered that there are various ways to be healthy, you just have to be willing to try them.

Maintaining my mental strength was only possible by becoming more comfortable with my own company. Prior to the pandemic, I had surrounded myself with groups of friends. When I lost this ability to be around others, I felt isolated and I had to learn to be my own best friend. I started listening to podcasts, reading, and meditating; together, these taught me how to be happy alone, something I was never comfortable with before.

I grew the strongest emotionally during this time. After school closed, I was able to move back home and spend an extended period of time with my family. However, during this time at home, I was not able to see my now fiancé for much of the pandemic. This was difficult, considering we had been (and still are) in a long-distance relationship. Although we could not physically be present with each other, technology allowed us to spend time together. We filled our time with Skype dinner dates, virtual movie nights, and games. We were able to use what skills we had acquired in our relationship to stay emotionally connected with each other.

Individually, our experiences with the pandemic can vary drastically. However, we can take this opportunity to make it through and adapt together. It is in the times of greatest discomfort that we are able to grow and learn about each other (and ourselves) in new ways.



Roots to Table

Adriano DellaPolla, M3



Starting my sophomore year of college, my dad and I started to make wine together as a means of time-traveling back to his Italian roots. My dad grew up in a small province outside of Avelino, Italy called Ponteromito. According to my dad's assessment via Google Maps, it hasn't changed much in the 40 years since he left, aside from a few new buildings and saplings-turned-trees. From the street images, my dad recognized a family friend standing outside their store, obviously older than he remembered, but knew the name and recognized the face instantly — predictable in a town with a population of 200. Traveling via Google Maps was the closest I've been to see the town where he was born. Seeing my dad reminisce on past experiences he had as we scrolled past each part of the street gave perspective and offered connection to the past: it was like I was able to be there with him as he would talk about the good old days.

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He grew up on a small farm where my grandmother, who passed away before I was born, cooked and made everything from scratch. He woke up to fresh baked bread every morning. My dad tells me tales of going to the curing shed to cut off a chunk of prosciutto or salami on his way to feed the chickens and cows, packing a little extra meat without his parents noticing into his lunch before walking to school. Pasta was made fresh daily. Homemade mozzarella and ricotta were staples for snacks and main courses. The garden was full of vegetables ready for the taking come spring; in late summer/ fall, tomatoes and veggies were canned and stored for the winter. Wine grapes were harvested each fall to make table wine for the year in late September. Whatever wasn't able to be made at home was bought from the local grocery.

My dad was the youngest of his siblings, meaning he didn't have much responsibility to the kitchen. True to Italian family dynamics at the time, he had three older sisters in the house who tended to the cooking as he cared for the livestock, so he never really payed much attention to the food that was served to him each night. As such, much of his knowledge of family recipes was lost when he left Italy at 22 on a vacation-turned-permanent stay in America. But when my grandfather passed away a few years ago, my dad honored his heritage by reviving the aspect of home that had not yet faded from memory: wine making.

Each year since my grandfather's passing, my dad and I have undergone a small-scale wine making production in late September. The first year we made a total of 12 gallons, half merlot and half pinot noir. It seemed like a lot at the time, but as the holidays passed most of the wine was gone before the new year. The next year we doubled it, and the year after added another 12 to the batch — just enough to give away most as gifts and keep a few for ourselves.



Left building is my father's elementary and middle school. Right building is the church where he was baptized.

Our wine making process is a bit modified from when my dad was young. Back then, he would mash the grapes between his toes in a bathtub (like Lucille Ball in *I Love Lucy*) and put the must in barrels to ferment. Today, we buy the juice in 6-gallon pales, but my dad has worked to honor most of the traditional process. Crush the grapes (or in our case: buy the must), add yeast, keep in a primary fermenter for a week, then transfer to a secondary fermenter and store for 8 weeks (making sure to keep it covered with an airlock). My dad was keen on it being as natural as possible by not using any chemicals. The wine he was used to at home was fresh and meant to be kept only for a short time, not stored. When fresh, the wine is bubbly, sweet, tasty and — most importantly — without sulfites (the stuff that allows wine to age without spoiling — and what hangovers are made of). However, this process would sometimes result in bottle bombs as the wine would still ferment in the bottles and pop the cork out, spilling the wine with it. A note of caution came with each gifted bottle: "drink in a few weeks or discard" — true to the days my dad remembers at his childhood home kitchen table.

Last year broke our 7-year wine making streak. The previous fall, my dad was diagnosed with stage III lung cancer. Wine making was replaced with chemotherapy and radiation appointments during Thanksgiving and Christmas. This time last year for me was a strange time in my personal and school life. It seemed like all the content I was learning in class was intermingling with my personal life, and I was seeing the real-life application of the material. I was learning from Dr. Silberstein about chemotherapies and new immunotherapies as my dad was receiving them. My maternal grandmother, who I adored and loved, unexpectedly passed away from complications of a pulmonary embolism during the same time we were learning about respiratory pathology. After the passing of my grandmother and my dad's diagnosis and treatment, I began to develop an anticipatory uneasiness of the remaining courses of the year. It was only fitting that during our Multisystem Disease course, COVID-19 came to our attention nationally.



Man fixing a tractor down the main road of Ponteromito. Pine trees in the background line the street where my father's childhood home stands.

But things are better now. It's been over a year since my dad's diagnosis and scans are clear. As for my family, despite the fear surrounding coronavirus, there have been spots of hope: I was able to be home for most of my dedicated study period for Step 1, time I wouldn't have had at home otherwise. It also allowed me to be home as my dad had a few bouts of pneumonia requiring hospitalization at the start of the pandemic. It allowed me to help my mom with doctor appointments, prescription pickups and sorting through the medical jargon of my dad's test results as she was simultaneously dealing with her mother's belongings as executor. I was able to help in ways I would not have been able to if I was still in Omaha.

With last year's debacles, wine making was not a major priority. However, it's something I wanted to carry on this year: a little piece of tradition and a piece of normalcy, a tradition that I don't want to — and won't let — fade away. A way for my dad and I to carry on a symbol of his hometown he left behind while carrying forward a family tradition to share at the dinner table.

My family just celebrated, for lack of better words, my dad's first year since being diagnosed with lung cancer. He's not cancer free yet but is doing as well as possible. This gives us further urgency to get together as a family (in a post-pandemic world), spend time with one another, and raise a glass. It's around the kitchen table that traditions continue in my family. Life, like wine, is in the present moment. Waiting for the right time runs the risk that it may come to pass or be forgotten, so enjoy it while it's still bubbling.

Sweet Potato Black Bean Casserole

Kyle Farrell, M3

Produce:

- 1 (15 oz.) can black beans
- 1/2 onion
- 1 red or green bell pepper
- 1 sweet potato, large
- 1 (14.5 oz.) can tomatoes

Condiments:

- 1 cup salsa

Baking & Spices:

- 1 tsp. chili powder
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon, ground
- 1 tsp. garlic salt
- 1 tsp. salt & pepper

Bread & Baked Goods:

- 2 tortillas

Dairy:

- 4 oz. cheese



Photo credit: thekitchn.com

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Spray an 8 x 8 baking dish with cooking spray; set aside.
2. In a large bowl, combine diced sweet potato (that has been slightly softened), black beans, tomatoes, onion, bell pepper, chili powder, garlic salt, and cinnamon.
3. Spread ½ cup salsa on the bottom of the baking dish. Arrange a tortilla on top, ripping into strips to get the right fit. Spoon a large layer of sweet potato/black bean mixture over tortilla strips. Spread the remaining ½ cup salsa over the sweet potato/black bean layer.
4. Add one more layer of tortillas and then add the rest of the sweet potato/black bean mixture over the tortilla layer. Top with cheese, if using.
5. Bake, uncovered, 20-25 minutes and until cheese is melted and top is slightly browned. Let stand 5 minutes. Cut into squares and serve. Top with additional salsa, cilantro, and/or avocado, if desired.

COVID, Nature Walks, Disc Golf, and the Origin of EMDR



It all started in early March, when I was just put on self-quarantine by the school. Suddenly, everything I was doing in life had been taken away. No going to clinic at the hospital. No going to the gym. No eating out with friends. All my favorite things had been put on hold for the next two weeks. As far as problems go, this is a tiny one. Nonetheless, my routine had been turned upside down. Like most med students, I love having a routine and being busy with activities. The idea of studying all day and going to bed was not attractive. Life requires balance. Thus, the quest for new, safe activities began.

During self-quarantine, the expectation is sitting in your room all day. If you are extra careful, you try to time your trips to the bathroom and the kitchen when your roommates are not out there. Cabin fever begins to set in. Restless and alone, I needed to get creative. I had been reading and watching sports, but the enjoyment from these activities only went so far. I wanted to leave the house. Prior to self-quarantine, I had never been someone who could go all day without leaving the house. A homebody, I was not. At the same time, I needed to be responsible. What could I do? This is where the idea of going on a walk finally came to me. Masks were still in short supply at this early stage of the pandemic, but I figured I could go alone. If I ran into other people, I could cross the street or jaywalk for a house or two. It seemed safe enough that I was willing to try it. One day, I left home after checking the apartment hall to make sure no one was around.

The next two hours were strange. I felt like I should be doing something, but I had already completed all of my schoolwork for the day. The longer I went, the more relaxation began to set in. Able to take in the scenery, I let my thoughts wander. I was most surprised by the variety of trees I saw in the neighborhoods. All the beauty surrounding me, I was taking it in for the first time. When I returned, there was also a great feeling running through my body. It wasn't quite like a workout high, but it wasn't far off. This would be the first of many walks.

Fast forward two months and things had not changed much. Self-quarantine turned into online rotations that were finally about to end. This is where I was first introduced to the game of disc golf. A classmate suggested we play, talking up the safety of the outdoors and ability to maintain distance on the course. Jonesing for social interaction, I happily obliged. It turned out to be a beginner-friendly game, and I was hooked from the first round. The game lasted about two hours, and when we left, I noticed something. It was that same feeling I got on those long walks — a mixture of relaxation and contentment. I was curious why this feeling was so satisfying. The answer wouldn't come for another couple of months.

One day while on a walk, I was listening to a podcast on the topic of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). Francine Shapiro first hypothesized that EMDR might help patients after she went on a walk and noticed that her anxiety was partially relieved. Trying to replicate that feeling, she found that EMDR mimics what walking does to your eyes. When you are moving forward, you are surveying your surroundings, eyes darting side to side. Delving into the research, I found studies that demonstrated the optic flow generated in this state quiets the amygdala response. Win, win, win. Not only does walking get me out of the house, it provides valuable exercise in the gym-less era and dampens stress responses. How is that for wellness?