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### Dr. G

*“He will be great!” A younger Dr. Giannini, (affectionately known as “Dr. G”) held baby Jason Kingsley, born June 27th, 1974, high in the air. This bold gesture instilled hope in Jason’s mother, Emily Kingsley.*

In the 1970’s, many infants born with a third 21st chromosome, “Downs babies”, sadly were dismissed early in life. Jason was fortunate to be under the care of pediatrician, Honorable Margaret J. Giannini, M.D., F.A.A.P., providing him with exceptionally increased chances for independence. Emily Kingsley, a writer for Sesame Street, brought the topic of disability into public awareness and television media for children. Jason, who appeared as a child with Down’s Syndrome on Sesame Street, is now 39 years old, speaks five languages and lives independently.

Dr. Giannini attended medical school in the US in the 1940s, when women medical students and physicians were in the slim minority with extremely limited options for education to become a physician. She founded the first Mental Retardation Institute at New York Medical College in 1950, the first of its kind. She was subsequently appointed by President Jimmy Carter as the first director of the National Institute for Handicapped Research in the Department of Education, now known as the National Institute for Disabilities Rehabilitation Research in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and later by President George W. Bush as the first Director of the Office on Disabilities in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

I was introduced to Dr. Giannini through Dr. Joseph Rosen (Dartmouth), an extraordinary creative visionary who I have worked with on a variety of medical engineering projects over the past eight years. Dr. G has been one of his long time mentors and supporters, funding some of his early nerve research through the Veterans Affairs Office. We were both participants in the Polytrauma conference at Dartmouth in 2008, and the Conference for Medical Training, Technology, and Treatment (MT3) in Orlando in 2009, spreading awareness regarding military injuries in the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and the future of medical education, respectively.

Dr. Giannini has not only encouraged me to become a passionate and caring physician for individuals, but to contribute to policy, public health, and advance the field of medicine through research. Her support of my career, and belief in my abilities continues to instill greater confidence in myself as a future female physician and leader. Her consistent message to me has been: “you will be a star. You have the stuff.” In the inevitable moments of doubt for pre-medical and medical students, especially for women, these words mean a great deal to me. I remind myself: “Dr. Giannini is a phenomenal person, physician, and leader in medicine and public health. I respect her a great deal. If she knows that I can do it, then I should know it too.”

While fueling my ambitions to become a leader in medicine, most importantly, Dr. Giannini

has inspired me to trust my abilities, and to work tirelessly to be the best person and physician that I can be. Dr. G is not just exceptional because she has countless accomplishments and awards (such as author in the Journal of the American Medical Women's Association and award recipient of the AMWA). Young at heart now in her 90's, Dr. G is a proud Italian American; she has style and spunk and charisma. She is the kind of woman that I hope to become. Married to a physician herself, she raised four sons in New York. At the same time, she was founding the field of rehabilitation with a vision for

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support for all ages and all types of disabilities. Her optimism is infectious, and grit impressive. If she believes in something, she simply does not take no for an answer. And she is so warm and energetic that she is widely loved.

Dr. Giannini fully embraces lifelong learning and a commitment to medicine. In her mid-90s, she is still working hard to improve quality of life for the roughly 54 million disabled individuals, including over six million children, in the United States and 500 million across the world. Her current project, Opportunity League, seeks to create community parks and fitness programs that will, in partnership, serve both disabled children and the general community in order to emphasize inclusiveness. This has been led in partnership with Hudson Valley Cerebral Palsy Association. As a medical student at Tulane, I am honored that Dr. G has asked me to help her assess opportunities for this work in New Orleans.

Serendipity and good fortune connected Dr. Giannini and me, and the impact of this relationship is impossible to quantify. On, October 11, 2013, she writes: "I think of you often and am here cheering you on. I am so proud of you for who you are and

what your passions are. All in the right place. Keep in touch as much as you can." I am confident that I will reference these words throughout the exhilarating yet challenging path through medicine.

Only somewhat recently have I recognized the importance of efforts to specifically support women in medicine, for example through membership in the AMWA. Senior physicians like Dr. Linda Brodsky and Dr. Margaret Giannini have paved the way for us female student doctors. Dr. Giannini's message to women students has always been that we are: "just as good as those guys, if not better! And remember, you have to always go the extra mile. It's not a question of ability, but hard work and determination. Work hard and prove yourself!" I seek to become a competent and compassionate physician, and am confident that I will make Dr. Giannini proud. May she likewise inspire female medical students now and in many years to come.