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The Hands That Shape Us

A small girl waddles into the darkness of a musty log cabin, barely visible under a red wind jacket and orange life preserver. I see her foot catch on a misplaced step and she falls, unable to catch herself, being bundled in movement-restricting garments. Quick-moving, loving hands pick the wailing child up. Inquisitive eyes begin a primary survey of the damage. The woman is greeted with a bloody scene: upper lip laceration on the mucosal surface, two front teeth in place but unstable. After determining that the lip laceration was superficial and didn't require sutures, the owner of the loving hands holds stabilizing pressure superiorly on the patient's teeth the entirety of the windy boat ride to the cottag across the St. Mary's River.

This is the earliest memory that I have of my mother as a physician. The girl in the red jacket is my little sister, who still has her front teeth, if you were wondering. My mother is a pediatrician and stay at home mom. Growing up with a mother who was a pediatrician was a huge blessing for my family. My siblings and I still went to get our vaccinations from a practicing physician, but most of our care growing up didn't require a trip to the pediatrician's office, it required a trip down the hall to get mom's stethoscope, blood pressure cuff and otoscope. I remember sitting on the side of the bathtub, waiting for the results of a rapid strep test, which occurred too frequent for my liking. My siblings and I weren't able to pull the wool over mom's eyes, so there were

no unnecessary sick days because she knew just how sick you were or weren't. It is hard to imagine growing up any differently.

I have the privilege of witnessing the kind of physician my mother is on a daily basis. Although she doesn't practice in the traditional sense of the word, she still retains a healer's heart. I believe that a healing heart is the most important, and the least focused on, aspect of a physician. Medical school doesn't teach a person to be compassionate and how to listen beyond the patient's words and get a glimpse of the patient's world. I don't know where my mother learned the skill to listen and have compassion, but I see it everyday. I can imagine that she gained a part of this trait while growing up in a loving and supportive environment, but only so much can be learned through osmosis, the rest has to be from practice. I hope that I can one day hold the essence of my mother's healing heart in my heart as I strive to be more like my mother and show compassion on a daily basis.

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As I have passed through many years of school and eventually finished applying for residencies, I have realized another characteristic that makes a physician great: selflessness. Patient care is at its best when it is centered on the patient. While this goal becomes somewhat of a feat with paperwork, decreased reimbursements, governmental regulations and daily insurance battles, I believe that it

should still be a physician's primary goal to attain a patient-centered practice. This is the type of practice that I whole-heartedly believe that my mother had.

I would love to have been a patient or the mother of a patient in my mother's practice in Grand Rapids, Michigan. My mother goes beyond the call of duty when driving six hours in one day to spend two hours with me when I felt like life has it out for me. She has surpassed this mark when delivering a meal and showing sympathy to a grieving widow. I have seen my mother feed the homeless and write to a shut-in at a nursing home. She cries with joy when you are happy and she holds you and cries tears of grief in times of hardship. If this is who she is on a daily basis without trying, I can only imagine the type of physician she was when she was trying. My mother is wholly focused on others and we all could learn a lesson about this type of self-sacrifice from her. I hope to bring this type of self-sacrifice into my practice one day.

The little girl in the red jacket is not only my sister in this story. The little girl is every single person in my mother's life. My mother approaches everyone with compassion and curiosity to know their story. I believe that this is part of the reason I wanted to become a physician, because I saw what type of person my mother is and knew that this type of person would be, and is, a wonderful physician. I want to be the person that people can come to in times of hurt and in times of hope. I want to be the person that can be trusted with someone's deepest fears. I want to heal with my knowledge of medication and the human body as well as with my heart. I feel lucky to have my mother as a role model, not only as a mother, but also as a physician. I hope that one day, I can change someone's life like she has for me. I have spent hours as a child watching her graceful hands and will continue to watch my mother's hands and mimic her movements in the effort of making my hands and heart into those of a true physician.