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An Unexpected Love

In the rooms covered in murals of Bambi and m&ms, a change was taking place within me. I was shadowing Dr. Lederhandler, my childhood pediatrician. I had known for many years I'd like to be a doctor, but this feeling was something new. Until now, I had never seriously thought that a career existed where everyday one looked forward to going into work. Even if one really liked their job, how could it possibly not get tiring? I admit that with my own job as a research assistant, there were days I did not want to spend running gel electrophoreses, even though as a whole I enjoyed and learned from my work. My time with Dr. Lederhandler was completely unprecedented.

Everyday I went to shadow her at the pediatric clinic, I would leave with a glow, ready to return. I noticed that after spending days with her, I would tell my mother more and more anecdotes of the precocious patients who tugged at my heart and how deftly Dr. Lederhandler was able to diagnose an ear infection with barely a glance. Before I began to shadow her, I did not even think I liked children. I was wrong. Like Jane Eyre (or as I prefer Belle from Beauty and the Beast), I was unexpectedly falling in love, albeit with a profession and not Mr. Rochester (or the Beast). Never before had I felt the sort of engagement that I felt when Dr. Lederhandler would call for test results and ask questions to try to get to the bottom of what was ailing her patient. This intriguing puzzle solv-

ing to figure out how to make the patient better was combined with deep fulfillment. I would smile while I played with the patients, distracting them so Dr. Lederhandler could talk to their parents or use her chilly stethoscope.

Dr. Lederhandler said that one of the things she enjoyed most about being a pediatrician was seeing her patients grow up and become the people they were meant to be over the years. While I was no longer her patient, I did a lot of growing in Dr. Lederhandler's office while I shadowed her. I thought about how I had arrived back in her office, eighteen years after my first visit.

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I have been lucky in many ways, as a woman interested in medicine and science. In high school, many of my science and math teachers were women who encouraged my love of these fields. Still, male students dominated the science competitions and organizations at my school. In college, I noticed fewer of my STEM teachers were women. In my calculus based physics class, there seemed to be three males for every female student. While seeing this was discouraging, I found refuge in biomedical research.

My freshman year, I began working as a research assistant at the Lois Pope Life Center under Dr. Sagen. Dr. Sagen is an Orthodox Jewish woman

who fought stereotypes as both a religious person and a woman in science. In her lab, I was given the freedom to work on my own project with the assistance of many other woman scientists from the undergraduate, medical school and post-doctoral level. Dr. Sagen and the female post-docs in her lab reemphasized to me that biomedical science was not only a boy's club through mentoring me and encouraging me to present my research at national conferences.

In college I also had the opportunity to shadow a female surgeon I admire greatly, Dr. Karp. Through shadowing Dr. Karp I saw how, even as a surgeon, one could make patients feel personally cared for by learning their language and always greeting them cheerfully. Even though Dr. Karp did not have a lot of time with her patients, she seemed universally beloved by them, and her colleagues alike. Dr. Karp showed me the type of physician I would like to be. Namely, a physician whose patients are always happy to see her.

I had arrived more steadfast in my desire to be a doctor than when I had left Dr. Lederhandler last as a patient in high school. I had not only fully incorporated studying science, and helping others into my life, but I had become a better listener. While my time away from Dr. Lederhandler had brought me new knowledge and strengths, returning to her taught me invaluable lessons.

She taught me that she often had to play the part of the psychologist. I remember one patient who came in not too visibly upset, but Dr. Lederhandler, knowing her patient, knew something was wrong. Dr. Lederhandler talked to her patient, and because the girl and her mother trusted her, she was able to get to the bottom of what was bothering the girl. Dr. Lederhandler recommended she see a professional psychologist. This taught me that while many may think simply wanting to help people is enough, it is not. Being a doctor goes beyond help-

ing your patient to knowing your patient and knowing where they come from.

Dr. Lederhandler also taught me that within me there is a passion I did not even know I had. While a love of learning, science, and helping and understanding others are necessary qualities to become a physician, Dr. Lederhandler showed me a quality just as needed to become a physician. By showing me her own passion for her career, Dr. Lederhandler awakened a passion within me. While she may not have realized it, Dr. Lederhandler had not only watched me become the person I was meant to be, but played an active role in helping me find my way to my career. I can only hope that one day, I can help young women the way Dr. Lederhandler helped me. It is because of her that I learned that there was a career where I do not doubt for a second would leave me feeling like I was making a difference every day of my life. That is a career in medicine, as a pediatrician.