

A Defining Moment

We all have defining moments in our lives.

First kiss.

First car.

First love.

First child.

The list is unique to each of us.

Today I had a defining moment that I never expected. I guess in some way I had always wanted it to come true but I had no idea what it would mean to me and, just as importantly, to my dear wife. I realized it on my drive home from work. As I pulled into the driveway, I struggled with how I wanted to present it to my wife. I walked in the back door and looked for Lauren. She was sitting on the couch in the living room working on her patients' charts. I went to the living room, put down my bag, took her hand and got down on one knee. She raised her eyes with a questioning look on her face. I took in her beauty - deep brown eyes, a comforting smile, a face that has become part of my soul.

"Lauren," I began. "We started on our wonderful journey together almost 2.3 decades ago." Her furrowed brow grew deeper. "We have created a warm and cozy home that holds a beautiful family."

"Could you get to the point," she asked in her playful, insouciant manner. "I have a lot of work to do."

I smiled and let out a small chortle.

"Today," I quietly pronounced, "We did something very special."

"By 'we' do you mean 'you' and by very special do you mean 'forgot to pay the electric bill again?'"

The lilt of her words intensified the harmony between us and cast a glow upon our world.

"Today," I continued, "we accomplished a tremendous goal together that neither of us could have done on own."

"Did you finish filing our joint tax return?" she guessed.

My love for the demi-goddess before me reached heights unimaginable.

"At 2:17pm today," I said leaning in and locking her gaze, "I made the final tuition payment, for Abby's first year of college."

She froze.

Her iridescent eyes began to shimmer as tears of joy magnified the light shining on her face. She wanted to speak but the glory of the moment arrested her faculties as she slumped forward into my arms like a centurion collapsing after her final victory.

We wept.

Our tears, the product of years of uncertainty as to whether we could actually come up with funds that forever have seemed insurmountable, flowed freely.

We did it!

Saving money by driving to North Carolina instead of flying.

We did it!

Realizing that cooking oil could be used upwards of five times before all of our meals started to smell like fish.

We did it!

Discovering that I needed to use deodorant every day **only** when I was seeing patients whose sense of smell was intact.

We did it!

Some people might say, "They are doctors. They make enough money to pay for college."

To this we say, yes, we are doctors.

We aren't business people.

We take as long with our patients as we need to because our goal in life is to help others first.

We went out on our own because we didn't want 'The Man' telling us how many units/customers/oh yeah...people we had to turn over in X amount of time to create Y amount of dollars for a machine that calculates the worth of a doctor, not by how good and caring they are as physicians but by how many RVUs they are worth.

We know we are a dying breed.

There are others like us. Many have been absorbed by the machine for financial reasons. Many have been absorbed because they just got out of residency and they decided to do what everyone else was doing.

It's the safe thing to do. Doctors like safe things. They have HUGE loans to pay off because when they were in college and wanted to become doctors they would have sold their souls to get into medical school.

I know I would have because I wanted to be a doctor just like my pediatrician was who always seemed to make me feel better after my mom took me to see him when I was sick. Yes. He would give me medications for whatever illness I had and physically I got better.

But here's the thing.

My mom and I would wait hours to see him. We sat in a waiting room that was always packed with ill children because we knew that when we got to see him, we were the only ones he was thinking about. While he was doing his medical thing, he spoke with us. He spoke with my mom about grown up topics and medical things and life. Then he spoke with me. He taught me what was going on in my body and how it could be treated. He opened to me a world of caring for others in a way that few others could. I distinctly remembering leaving his office one time – I had an ear infection – and telling mom that I was already feeling a little better.

That feeling didn't come from a medication.

It came from learning from someone who cared and took the time to explain what was going on inside of me.

That became my quest in life. A quest that I achieved in no small part to the fact that my dad was a businessman and he wanted his children to be able to achieve their goals.

This is what any good parent hopes to do.

And today Lauren and I have reached a milestone.

A huge milestone.

We have been able to get our daughter a little closer to becoming the person, for others, that she wants to be.

Having achieved this goal, it gives us a little more confidence that we can do the same for our son, Vincent.

And as long as my wife's Honda lasts, we'll be able to take a vacation or two.

My next quest is to figure a way to build a bridge to Hawaii.