



Thomas Tullius Jr.

Thanksgiving is rolling around, and I am happy to be able to attend rounds of Thanksgiving meals with various members of my family without having to travel half way around the state or even the country.

I am an El Paso native, and I feel very lucky to be a part of the Inaugural class of the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine. The first few months of the school year have been full of new experiences, new friends and a new way of learning that has pushed my capabilities as well as those of my classmates.

I have heard horror stories about the first year of medical school, but there is a different feeling here. There are, of course, the long hours of studying and the stench of formaldehyde in the chilly anatomy lab, but this medical school, the El Paso Medical School, is trying to accomplish something different.

The uniqueness of the curriculum has made the learning more relevant, yet more demanding. Sometimes I wish that I was able to concentrate solely on studying the academic part of medicine and was not expected to see a standardized patient each week, learn relevant medical skills, and volunteer in a neighborhood clinic. I would have so much more time on my hands to study and, in effect, to relax. But that is not the case. We are taught medical skills and bedside manner on a weekly basis, and once a month, I have been able to volunteer at the San Vicente Clinic on Alameda. I take patient histories, perform elementary physical exams on patients, and get to observe a great Nurse Practitioner, Juanita Capoché. I am in no way fluent in Spanish, but my time in the clinic has already brought back much of the language I lost while away at college. Often times, I feel like I am being pulled in many different directions, going from lecture to phlebotomy training to standardized patients and back to lecture. At the end of the day, though, I feel that the clinical aspect sets a stage for the basic science portion of the curriculum, and it is often times what I remember most.

At the moment, we are all adjusting to the new curriculum — students, teachers, and administrators. The school is still a “work in progress,” but I think that with the leadership, dedication, and creativity that is at our disposal, we can make it work.

I am learning medicine in a place I never thought I could. It is a special feeling to know that I am volunteering at a clinic just down the road from my grandmother’s house. El Paso is my home, and I am happy to be growing as a person, student, and future physician as the medical community in El Paso is finally hitting its stride.

Aparna Atluru

We’re boxed in 24 hours a day with six hours to parcel between sleep and eat—and remember that I’m a human and not a memorization machine. “One half of knowing what you want is knowing what you must give up before you get it,” noted playwright Sidney Howard. Some of us knew more than others, though all of us I’m sure had heard some form of the Sisyphean punishment myth regarding medical school.

Paul L. Foster, it seems, truly did their picking—diversity. Maybe it’s because there are only 40, and there’s no way you’re escaping knowing anyone. And it’s a pleasant endeavor. We’ve got the beyond sarcastic, we’ve got the older haven’t-been-back-to-school-shopping since 1994 contingent, we’ve got the requisite 22 year-old post-college kids that just aren’t sure how they got wrapped up in this cocoon.

There are two communities (with many subsets of course)—namely those who never envisioned being enrolled in medical school, whose route to Paul L. Foster were rather circuitous. And of course there is the other community. It isn’t that I don’t value my place. I do. It’s just that it wasn’t something that I hadn’t imagined in my wildest dreams. I took a charted course. I didn’t do the impossible. And sometimes there is more value in the impossible.

We all have the scores, yes. We’ve been sitting through Neuroanatomy for the past nine weeks, at times utterly despondent; unable to understand why it was necessary to know this much about Millard-Gubler syndrome, when maybe I had my heart set on pediatrics.

We are all seeking it. Travel writer Pico Iyer writes, “Perhaps happiness, like peace or passion, comes most when it isn’t pursued.” Too late.

I have today off, an entire twenty four hours free of Neuroanatomy, and biochemistry and the meaning of HEENT. I’m almost tempted to tear up, not knowing what I ought to do with that much free time. So we’ve grown into marathon runners who perish by simple miscalculation, who could die from drinking too much water to keep them running. To avoid such tragedies, medical school in a way reteaches one how to breathe.

We seem to reside in monastery, though many of us had never quite signed up for it. Renunciation. We till our Zen garden with books. With involuntary vows to stay chaste from television, and current affairs, and the Houston Rockets’ win streak. And by conveniently vacuum packing the rest of the world up and away, medical school has brought our thirty nine into that cliché word ‘community.’ I’ll rechristen it cloister.

Just now we’re entering our first medical school Thanksgiving and Christmases in an altered- medical-school state of vision. This past week, the mother of one of my classmates arrived from Midland and cooked our class, all 40, a thanksgiving meal. “It’s a worthy cause, Mrs. Castillo, feeding medical students,” remarked one of our classmates.

Perhaps Mr. Iyer is right, maybe well-being lies in the optimistically skewed translation of one’s circumstances.