

VOICES FROM THE HOUSE STAFF



UNIVERSITY OF UTAH HEALTH

Voices from the Housestaff 2022

A collection of 55-word
stories from residents at the
University of Utah

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Acceptable • Sara Coomes

Children give me permission.

The great gift! Don't tell the grown ups (or do)!

The secret: I'm excitable, weird, silly, and kind
- once told too much so - but in this colorful
place, with giraffe X-ray machines,
being who I am might make toddlers giggle in
dawn hours.

That's reason enough.

always forward • Ellen Gilbertson

you have three-quarters of a leg on the left
and smiling eyes

above a yellow mask

'your mask is pink you must be special'

I ask about the elephant on the bed

(beer, rain, bloody pavement)

you wrote him a letter, told him you loved
him

I trace angry stump scars

find you a new pink mask

Being for the Benefit of Mr. B • Omar Rachdi

Doritos on chest. South Park.

Calling me Oscar. The occasional,

I should cover my Junk, huh?

I hope that last line was as uncomfortable for
you
As it was for us.

The repeat admissions
Crying in my hands while delirious
Coming to terms with harsh
Realities
I would never change a thing about you,
Mr. B

Critical Care Fellow • Katie Hendrickson

Wet, cold, black surrounds me
It holds me down, swallows me whole
Desperate, I propel myself up
Reaching for that speck of light
My chest burns, urging me forward
But I feel your hand on my head
Holding me down, pushing me back
I am too weak to resist
Wet, cold, black envelopes me

Darkness • Thomas George

Darkness descends
We all scurry home
Waiting
Waiting until the darkness has lifted
Waiting while the battle rages
Fought with oxygen
And half-hearted prayers

A hero emerges, small, but mighty
Packaged in vials, free to all
Offering an end to endless winter
But the hero is spit upon, ridiculed
Darkness persists, morning lights dream
forgotten

Dax's Orange Hat • Mark Sims

Dax's orange hat
is all that's on my mind this
gray October day.

Waiting to go home
you fell asleep in the lobby,
now you wait again.

Looking into
your deep shallow breaths,
I see only death.

Directions • Kristen Durbin

You arrived alone that autumn night, your tiny
body shuttled urgently across state lines to a
fluorescent ICU waystation via moonlit sirens.
The maiden voyage of your first three
months, your fixed gaze a compass toward a
yet uncharted destination.
By morning: "The morgue?" your nurse
offered, "It's on the first floor past the
cafeteria."

First Date No. 3 • Kristen Durbin

"You're a resident?"

"Yeah, I'm a pediatrician and psychiatrist."

"So you're in medical school?"

"I already graduated, I'm a doctor."

"Wait, pediatricians do kid stuff, right? What's a psychiatrist again?"

"I prescribe medication for mental illness."

"So you're a psychologist?"

"No, but I do therapy."

"Cool, I need a therapist!"

(After this, so do I.)

Hats and Masks • Liam Clark

I like my mask

I don't have to pretend to smile

Don't have to disguise my grimace when I
smell that

Or the twist of my lips when arguing about
vaccines

It smells like my mint gum from this morning

like my breath, a small warm caress
on my cheek, intimate and small

It pulls on my ears, but my patients can't tell if
I've brushed my teeth

And at the end of the day

Unlike the hats I wear

I can take it off

Inadequate • Liam Clark

"My father died, slipped in the shower."

>I didn't know

"He knocked over a bottle of bleach and laid there overnight."

>I'm sorry

"He had chemical burns over 80% of his body when we found him."

>I'm so sorry

"What's the autoantibody most commonly associated with cerebellar degeneration?"

>I don't know, I'm sorry

Injecting Daxinib • Omar Rachdi

"I'm sick, Doctor!"

But you knew that I knew that already.

You call me evil

But how would you know it

Unless you live it already

You wouldn't get vaccinated

Rather be incarcerated

Say that I'm profiteering

From every diagnosis

That has COVID-19 associated

You insult my family
And that's when
I stop you there

The Last Lullaby Trilogy (Part 1) • Omar

Rachdi

I stand on the side you can still see from
Out of respect for your culture and the
Viral induced hypercoagulable state that
Formed the clot,
Leading to your stroke.

Your heart transplant just happened.
You did nothing wrong:
Fully vaccinated.

Hemorrhagic transformation.
Flatline.

Shamans bless you,
Pointing to your chest,
"They Both rest now"

Mrs. S • Katie Hendrickson

Your thin skin
Soft and wrinkled
Lying over
Bulky, crooked joints
I can't help but wonder

What led us here
Sitting
Holding hands
In the end

Med Clearance • Ben Drum

She told me she
wanted to climb
fifteen stories,
the date her mom died,
on a clear Saturday night,
while her friends partied,
and lean back until she fell
so she could see the stars
streaming down
like she was,
and feel close to them
at the end.

Tox screen negative.
Suicide precautions.
Awaiting placement.

Motivations • Selene Rubino

I feel fine, she said;
Mid-sixties, leisure-class, two dogs, a pool,
and a glass of wine. I'll cut back;
One pack per day, forty-plus years.
I know the risk;
LDL 190, SBP 140, estrogen patch

I'd rather die than try the meds.
What a pity.
I don't feel fine.

NRP • Allison Cool

Blue and floppy you arrive
"Punky" is what we call your type
The fluid that cradled you safely now drowns
your little lungs
Up, up goes the PIP
Up, up the cadence of your heart responds
I hold my breath, hoping that you take your
first
At last, you cry
The song of new life

Notes on PPE • Kristen Durbin

What if we could cover up blemishes, hide
greens between teeth, muffle poorly timed
giggles, and catch unexpected tears with a
single object?
What if it tipped morning makeup routines
into obsolescence? What if it changed how
we regard each other?
What if it protected us by preventing
contagion?
Seems too good to be true.

Salaam • Omar Rachdi

Avalon Be Damned
My Place is here.
Your struggles are so real they are
Nearly palpable, even if they are:
Unseen
Unheard
Not welcomed

“Salaam Alaikum”

The greeting we know to mean
Peace be with you
Brings a smile to your face,
Cheek to cheek.

I’m not leaving until you are:
Seen
Heard
Welcomed

six minutes in room eleven • Ellen Gilbertson
brown eyes wild with panic
sweat at her brow, blood on the bed
a barely-life, seven years in the making
cold gel on her belly, then
a flutter on the screen -
the glass in her eyes shatters into tears
and he’s not supposed to but
dad hugs me through a blue plastic gown

The Spark (Excerpt) • Omar Rachdi

Seeing them identify

The Spark

That lives within all of us.

“Nurture, Love, Educate”,
The motto we all believe in and is why we are
all teachers
Fighting more than just ignorance.
We are lifting up
For a better life
For those that come
After us.

If your spark needs more kindling,
Come find me.

This is What We Signed Up for • Liam Clark

You sign
But after signing is when the terms are set
Scrolling out from the end of the pen
Each article and paragraph
each week, each month, each year.
We don't understand what we signed up for
until--
unsure of what else to say--
we say it to each other.

Unforgetting • Sara Coomes

I remember touching her face, I knew it was
the last last time.
Those atoms would be reborn into something
not my mother.
I remember as his mother brushes hair from
his forehead again again,
brings her face to his.
I remember hearing mothers lose their heart's
heart,
grating guttural suffering.
I remember and remember.

Was it All Worth It • Emily Sierakowski

To seeing death. I can't grieve. To seeing
abuse. I am useless. To the trap of endless
debt.
I can never leave now.
To the time with people I valued, dissipated
by the need to be elsewhere
To the thoughts only containing
I am and will never be good enough. *Was this
all worth it?*

We Will Fix This: An Erasure • Julia Moss

Here you are
I am just asking for what we deserve
I'm not good
How do I fix it
I thought I was dying

We all know
I'm telling
The people gotta know
Uncomfortable
I feel
Lost
How do I fix this
Fixated
Worried
I can feel
I think I see
I'm ready

What Really Matters • Laura Fitzgerald

Sixty seconds of silence.
No murmur, no gallop;
No S1/S2.
The dissonance of announcing "time of death"
in a unit accustomed to welcoming new life.

All too soon, the pager whisks me away.

Mother of a healthy newborn, complaints
about delayed discharge echoing in my ears.
And I cannot find it in me
To care

Yellow • Claire Tursak

Yellow is the archetypal color of insanity,
which is doing the same thing over and over

expecting different results.
Every day we
don and doff,
don and doff
our disposable gowns
and gradually,
imperceptibly to our own eyes
as trickles of tears escape our grasp
like water
carving the canyons,
we are shaped into physicians.

Statements from the Authors

Liam Clark, Neurology. Liam is a fourth-year neurology resident. The humanistic side of medicine was what attracted him to the field in the first place, and poetry is one way of honoring that. After he finishes his residency training, he will start a fellowship in headache medicine. All of his poems published here were based on things he overheard, was told in conversation, or experienced in the past year.

Allison Cool, Pediatrics. I am a resident who is always just as challenged to practice brevity in my clinical notes as I am in these short poems. I enjoy the art of reflecting on clinical experiences and chiseling them down to the real substantial bits.

Sara Coomes, Pediatrics. Sara is a visual artist and physician resident who lives and works in Salt Lake City. She finds joy in watching the growing of things and sitting in sunlight. She continues to work on poems that explore the sublime in daily life and the workings of nature.

Ben Drum, IM-Peds. Ben is a fourth year resident in internal medicine-pediatrics with an interest in medical narrative.

Kristen Durbin, Triple Board. Kristen is a third-year Triple Board (pediatrics/adult psychiatry/child psychiatry) resident navigating her identity as a person and physician through writing and reflective practice. She draws wisdom, humor and inspiration from her patients and colleagues across these three medical disciplines.

Laura Fitzgerald, Pediatrics. Laura is a second year pediatric resident and aspiring pediatric palliative care physician. She is typically very verbose in her writing (in both patient care documentation and creative pieces), so she found crafting this submission to be quite challenging and fulfilling.

Thomas George, IM-Peds. Internal Medicine and Pediatrics second year resident. Interested in the intersection of humanities and medicine.

Ellen Gilbertson, EM. A brand new emergency medicine resident, reveling in brief yet purposeful connection both inside and outside of the hospital. plays best in snow.

Meredith Humphreys, REI fellow. Meredith is a fellow in REI, with a particular interest in epigenetics and preimplantation genetic testing, and conversations around the sacrifice asked of those who hope for a healthier future.

Julia Moss, IM-Peds. Julia is a second year resident in Internal Medicine & Pediatrics. She enjoys hiking, sappy romance books, and getting her hands dirty in the garden.

Omar Rachdi, PM&R. I always feel better after writing; it is medicine for my soul (a bit much, but the truth), and I just like letting go of my logic brain for a bit.

Selene Rubino, IM. Selene is a categorical IM PGY-1 with remarkably few distinctions, awards, or exciting hobbies. She generally enjoys it here. The work was inspired by many great primary care attendings who freely and wisely share their knowledge.

Emily Sierakowski, Pediatrics. Emily is a second-year pediatric resident from Minnesota.

Mark Sims, Palliative Care Fellow. I am a current Hospice and Palliative Medicine

Fellow at the University of Utah. I am interested in using poetry and prose to commemorate and process the experiences I have with my patients at the end of life. I was inspired by the tradition of the Japanese Haiku form which are often written near the end of life. Their words capture the finality and solemnity of death.

Claire Tursak, Pediatrics. I started writing poems in medical school to process the challenges of medical training. Through poetry, I have been able to cope with the emotional burden of caring for suffering patients, deal with serious self-doubt, and shine a light on the joys of caring for tiny humans. Now, as a resident, writing feels more important than ever.