



Perspective/Opinion

Love in the Time of Medicine: Better Together

By Tracy Bui

*'How bold one gets when one is sure of being loved'
Sigmund Freud*

When I share about my wife, Kacey, I talk about her in a way that sometimes borders on the absurd. And 'absurd' might be the only way that I can describe our relationship and medical school experience. I am a member of the MCW medical school class of 2024, the class that started in 2020 in the midst of a global pandemic.

But COVID19, with all its tragedy, gave my wife and me a gift.

My acceptance to the Medical College of Wisconsin was bittersweet because Kacey is an MD/PhD student at the University of Minnesota. This meant I would get to work toward my dream of becoming a physician, but it also meant that we would have to become long-distance for 4 years. COVID and the need for our class to socially distance gave way to asynchronous virtual lectures and once-weekly small groups and anatomy lab. If things aligned, I could feasibly commute in, attend class, and commute back the same day. With some planning, we could cut our long-distance from 4 years to 2.



But this plan was daunting. The plan required I spurn a traditional medical student experience and essentially become a commuter student. Except that my commute would be roughly 660 miles round trip. The clinical years of medical school would be even trickier to plan. With only one car between us and the need for me to move to Milwaukee, I would have to figure out a way to get to rotations and back and forth from Saint Paul, MN, without a vehicle. Not to

mention figuring* out clerkship scheduling to plan for and maximize trips home.

Now that I am roughly halfway into my 3rd year, I have taken over 55 round trips between Milwaukee and Saint Paul - roughly 750 hours or over 36,000 miles of commuting by bus, train, or car.

I think the argument could be made that this is why non-traditional students can struggle. We have life experiences, duties, and obligations that take us away from our medical education. Taking the Greyhound home Friday evenings meant that I couldn't volunteer for MCW's Saturday Clinic for the Underinsured and those 750 hours that could have gone toward reading and revising. But I believe this disadvantage is also one of my greatest advantages. My focus and prioritization of what is most important to me allows me to be extremely present with any extracurricular time I do have. I only participate in activities that I can commit to passionately. The alternative would be taking time away from my family for something I wasn't passionate about. As a result, I believe I am an efficient and incredibly intentional medical student.

My wife, my reason for all this, sometimes also wonders if I would have been more successful without so many obligations. I don't tell her enough how our commitment to each other doesn't just make me a better person, it makes me a better student and physician-in-training. I don't tell her enough how remaining grounded and satisfied in our relationship while overcoming challenges helps me envision how I may also find satisfaction during tough times throughout my medical training. Kacey is admittedly thin-skinned. She takes time to think and feel deeply about everything. Contrastingly, I am thick-skinned and would describe myself as efficient. I come from a community with few resources and believe that the best way I can serve is to act fast and to act well, so that I may serve as many as I can in the short amount of time we have. In the same way I carry my community with me as I navigate medicine, I carry my wife with me as well. She reminds me to slow down, to be patient, and to give grace. She took the best parts of me and has helped me grow into someone that I didn't know I could be and pursue dreams I thought too big.



I credit my confidence, steadiness, boldness, and kindness to the both of us.

As we look to the future, to residency and the Match, we'll do what we planned for me for medical school: draw a 6-hour radius circle around the Twin Cities and only consider programs within that circle. This may sound absurd to some, that I was willing to forgo becoming a physician and now, risk not matching into residency so that I may remain close to my wife. Leading with love has shaped me into who I am today, given me more than I could have ever hoped for, and reminds me of a quote by Frederich Nietzsche, "*[s]he who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.*" And, if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. Marriage requires sacrifice and at times, takes me away from my medical training. But without my relationship with my wife, medicine would have received a lesser physician.

*I am unable to express my immense gratitude to every coordinator who helped make this daunting venture possible. I cannot stress enough that I would not have been able to

accomplish the commute or thrive in medical school without them. Special thanks to: Dana Sibilski, Jennifer Klumb, Laura Kopacki, Catie Fihn, Kim Wilson, Michelle O'Donnell, and Molly Falk-Steinmetz.

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