

Tribute

The loss of a friend

I rose at 6:30 to get a head start on cramming those last few arrhythmias. Grabbing a large coffee, I hid myself away for the remaining hours before the exam. I wanted to make the best of the time I had.

Later, in the auditorium, I faced the exam with my classmates. It wasn't all that bad, I thought. But a knock at the door distracted me. I saw Vera, our student officer, motion to one of the invigilators, and then to the other, to come outside. I tried to stay focused. After a minute or so, the two invigilators re-emerged, only to look solemnly at the list of exam numbers and class members displayed by the overhead projector. I paused. I refocused once again. Then came the announcement: "Ladies and gentlemen, your attention for a second. Today, you must remain in the auditorium after completing the exam." Now my heart was racing. What did we do wrong this time? We must be in for another talking to. I had a creeping feeling in my stomach.

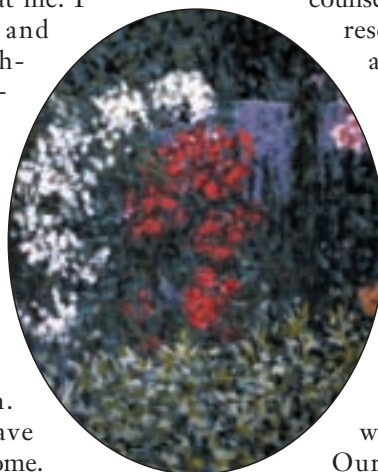
Vera returned before we had finished. One of the invigilators asked her to give us five more minutes. Tissues in hand, she retreated once more. My gut was still gnawing at me. I handed in my paper and asked to use the wash-room. By the time I returned, several pastoral care workers were standing at the back of the auditorium. Something had happened. And now the dean of medicine was standing before us. It's not every day you get a visit from the dean. None of us could have imagined what was to come.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this morning your classmate, Gina Blundon, collapsed in her home. She was brought into emergency very early this morning but was unable to be resuscitated." Silence. Then tears. Then hugs.

And more tears, sobs. Several others spoke to us about what had happened. A soft-spoken and obviously affected physician described his efforts. A counsellor told us about the resources we would have access to in the minutes, hours and days to come. We all remained. Even the most stoic among us wept.

Our thoughts were of missing Gina. Of disbelief. How could this have happened? Why did it happen? How would we cope with this death?

Our thoughts leapt to Kevin, her soulmate, and her parents. What must they be feeling? How could we extend ourselves to help a family few of us knew? That weekend we came together as a class on a number of occasions, to cry, to remember,



to share our doubts and fears, our sadness and anxiety.

We attended the funeral wearing our name tags to show Gina's family that she had been respected by her classmates. She had been one of the most intelligent among us. She had entered medicine for the right reasons. She would have made a gifted doctor, for she would have cared so much for the patient, the person, who was before her. She would have been committed to each patient, each person. She would have made a colleague of whom to be proud.

What could come from Gina's death, a chance encounter with an aggressive viral myocarditis? Perhaps a realization of our own mortality. Perhaps a question: Were we living every day to the fullest? We thought of Gina's giant, famous smile, her colourful earrings and bright socks, her way of adding brightness to life with gestures as simple as tucking a small thank-you gift into notes and books she had borrowed from a friend. In such details she will be remembered; she will exist through us and in the doctors we become.

That morning before the exam I

struggled to make the best of the time I had. We find comfort in knowing Gina made the best — indeed, more than she knew — with the time she had. May God grant her peace.

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Gina Doreen Blundon, of Carbonear, Nfld., daughter, sister, soulmate, friend, occupational therapist and medical student, died in St. John's in her 26th year on May 18, 2001.