

Drawing patients closer: five gentlemen

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As an intern at the Royal Victoria Hospital (Montréal), I began keeping a diary in black and white-lined composition books, the kind we had in grade school. The pages are collages of photographs, newspaper clippings from *The Star*, *The Gazette* and *La Presse*, and sketches of patients with snippets of our conversations that I made on whatever paper I happened to have in my hand — from prescription pads and paper towels to the wrappers of latex gloves and sterile gauze.

I began sketching as a way to spend a few extra moments with patients and to focus more closely on their expressions. These drawings bring back the essence of an encounter, a detail of personality and the fragmentary clues that patients are giving to the doctor about their experience with illness. I have continued to sketch, and I awaken each day with the wonderful faces of patients in my mind and their poignant or humorous stories.

I learned from my father, a general practitioner for 37 years in the same town in which he was raised, Rockaway Beach, New York, that the attribute most patients seek in a doctor is the ability to listen. His office was in our home, where every afternoon the living room became the waiting room. I never thought of his countless devoted patients as other than our house guests. I cherish their memory, as I do of the patients whom I have been privileged to serve in my 37 years as a family physician.

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This article has been peer reviewed.

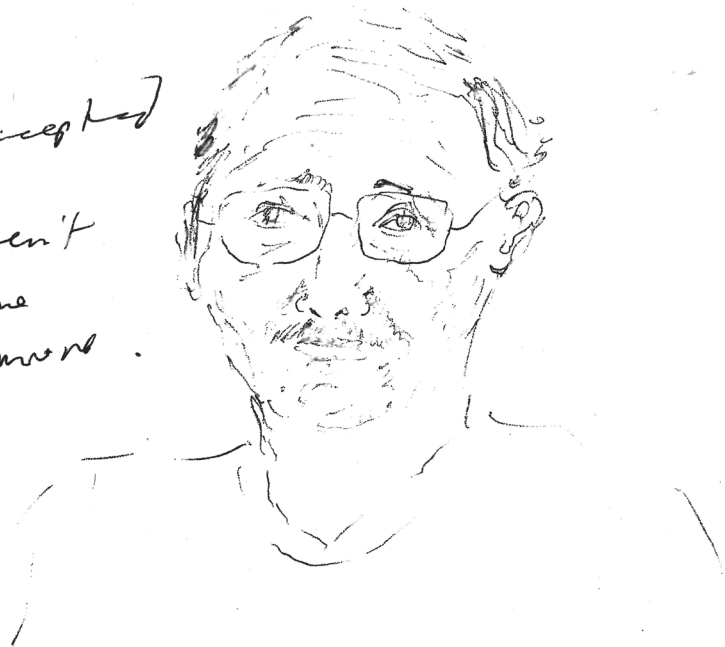
These sketches and notes were made more than three decades ago.

you agree with me that after 20 your vision & stuff starts to go down



You agree with me that after 20 your vision and stuff starts to go down. Just natural aging.

I've accepted the fact she doesn't love me anymore.



I've accepted the fact she doesn't love me anymore.



She thinks people
are coming at night
she gets up and
goes outside
The neighbors found her on
the lawn at 3 in
the morning

they had a
fellow who's
an amputee
lost his (L) hand
about here in
an automobile
accident
about 7 years ago

Christ, he's got a
universal in there
got a little pump
& gives him a grip
on the club
damn thing acts
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hand

She thinks people are coming at night. She gets up and goes outside. The neighbors found her on the lawn at 3 in the morning. ... They had a fellow who's an amputee. Lost his left hand about here in an automobile accident about 7 years ago. Christ, he's got a universal in there. Got a little pump and gives him a grip on the club. Damn thing acts just like a regular hand.



I think my
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like me



I think my biggest problem is that there's a group of people that just don't like me.

Doctors are bad luck. Every time I see 'em, they find something wrong.