INSPIRED TO CREATE

Three medical students on what prompted them to take up an artistic challenge

BY KIM KISER

In May, students and faculty from the University of Minnesota Medical School gathered at the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum to celebrate this year’s recipients of the Fisch Art of Medicine Student Awards. The awards program, in its eighth year, was established by Robert Fisch, MD, a retired pediatrician who is himself an artist. Its purpose is to encourage medical students to step away from their studies and explore an artistic interest.

This past year, 14 students received awards and used them to study drawing, painting, jewelry making, photography, Irish dance and music. During the celebration, the students shared their stories about what inspired them, why they chose to do what they did and what they learned from the experience. Here are three of those stories.

Jaime Kingsley-Loso

As a girl growing up in Harmony, Minnesota, Jaime Kingsley-Loso was a doodler. “I’ve always doodled,” she says, explaining that she was inspired by her grandmother who considered everything from the margins of the phone book to the backs of envelopes to be a canvas. “If you saw my folders and notes from class when I was a kid, they were all doodled on,” she says.

Kingsley-Loso never considered doodling to be art. “In fact, I took one drawing class in college and did more poorly than I did in any other class,” she recalls. “I thought drawing wasn't for me.”

Last year, she took her daughter and son, now ages 5 and 6, to the Fisch awards celebration to see what some of her friends had done. It got her thinking: What would she do creatively if she had the opportunity and resources?
**Eva Lu**

Eva Lu’s nudge to take up figure drawing came from a patient she met during her OB/GYN rotation. The woman was a Minneapolis artist who did charcoal and oil figure painting as well as impressionistic painting. Lu, who grew up in Fuzhou on the southern coast of China, had studied Chinese painting and oil painting as a child.

Over a long clinic visit, their conversation turned to art. Lu told the woman how art had once been an outlet for her but that she set it aside when she started medical school. The patient challenged Lu to again make it part of her life. “She encouraged me to slow down, take a moment to soak in the beauty of life and really live in the present,” Lu recalls.

With that in mind and after hearing how friends who had received Fisch awards found the experience invaluable, Lu decided to apply. She used the money to purchase supplies and take a figure drawing class at The Atelier, a studio in Minneapolis.

On Sundays, she and a group of professional artists and artists-in-training would set up their easels and draw a model seated on an elevated platform. “The entire setting was very private, peaceful and very conducive to creating art,” Lu recalls. And being able to immerse herself in something other than medicine on the weekends was “incredibly therapeutic.”

As she begins her anesthesiology residency at the University of Michigan, Lu says she hopes to continue drawing. “It has been a beautifully therapeutic time when I can observe, connect, learn, discover inner peace and all the while create art that really is a product of living in the moment,” she says of the studio sessions.

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Kingsley-Loso decided she wanted to try drawing again and applied for a Fisch grant. She used it to enroll in an expressive arts class while taking part in a three-week integrative healing course on the Big Island of Hawaii. One of her assignments was to draw something quickly—in five minutes. Doodles came naturally. “It became like a meditation for me,” she says. When she got home, Kingsley-Loso bought art supplies and decided to make greeting cards, remembering how important the letters and cards she received from her grandmother were to her in college (“They felt like home”) and how letters shaped her relationship with her husband. When they started dating, he lived in Nebraska and she was in Minnesota. They wrote letters that included doodles, pictures, even crossword puzzles. “The letters were like an expression of the evolution of our relationship,” she says.

Kingsley-Loso crafted her cards just days before the awards celebration and was surprised when people asked if they could buy them. (She ended up giving them away.)

Kingsley-Loso, who is starting a residency in dermatology at the University of Minnesota, says she plans to continue doodling and making cards—and encouraging her kids to do the same. “In medicine, you’re always working toward this ultimate goal. We sometime forget that this is our life, and the moments are what we have,” she says. “We need to enjoy the process and the journey and not just look toward the end.”
Emily Wolff

Before medical school, Emily Wolff spent two years teaching science at Best Academy East, a charter school in north Minneapolis. The school was relatively new at the time, and the Teach for America corps member recalls her frustration over not being able to find good classroom materials. “There was no curriculum when I started, and I would go home every night desperately trying to figure out what to do to teach these kids,” she says.

Few books dealt with science in a way she felt was appropriate for elementary school students. “You can find cute stories that aren’t really accurate, or you can find books that are very information-heavy and not really fun to read to a class,” she says.

Wolff, who grew up in Davey, Nebraska, came from an artistic family. Her father, a veterinarian, does woodworking and sketching; her mother makes pottery; her sister is a graphic designer. Wolff, too, had made pottery before starting medical school (she calls her two years of teaching “a little detour” on her road to medicine). Although she had never considered herself to be good at drawing, she kept thinking about the kids she had taught and their need for good science books and decided to apply for a Fisch award, so she could learn more about book-making.

The grant allowed her to take a class on creating picture books at Minneapolis College of Art and Design. During the eight-week session, Wolff produced four full-page illustration spreads and numerous storyboards. One told the story of two girls who attempted to catch the moon but instead captured fireflies. “A good storybook tells a story with pictures more than words,” she says, adding that she learned about things she never thought about—where to place text on a spread, how to accommodate the centerfold, which colors do and do not print well as text. “There’s so much more to this than drawing,” she says.

Wolff hopes to continue with these efforts as she begins the North Memorial family medicine residency program in Minneapolis. Ultimately, she would like to collaborate with a writer to produce some medical-themed books that she could self-publish and make available to kids in her clinic. “That’s my dream.”

Kim Kiser is an editor of Minnesota Medicine.