

Residency Diary: Fifth Year—Reflection

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I have a running “to do” list that grows bigger as the years go by. Currently, that list includes preparing for tomorrow’s cases, watching ~50 boards prep lectures, submitting a couple abstracts, and packing a hospital bag for my wife Anna’s delivery

A note from the Editor-in-Chief: I am pleased to present to readers of Clinical Orthopaedics and Related Research® the next installment of “Residency Diary,” which is the last one for Drake LeBrun MD, MPH. Over the last five years, Dr. LeBrun has graciously chronicled his journey through residency, sharing his most memorable experiences—both personal and professional—with us. Congratulations to Dr. LeBrun for completing his training, and thank you for giving us a glimpse into your world. This column will continue with a new resident. We welcome reader feedback on all of our columns and articles; please send your comments to eic@clinorthop.org.

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(she’s due this month). There is a lot going on.

Every few months, “Residency Diary” pops up on that list. Unlike the other items on the list, which require varying degrees of thought, writing this column is unique. After all, reflecting during residency is no easy feat.

Residency is full of challenging experiences, and writing this “Residency Diary” column has been tough in its own way. With so much of my mental effort focused on preparing for the future, “Residency Diary” reminded me to do something uncomfortable and foreign: look back on my past and just *reflect*. As this is my last column—by the time you read this, if things go according to plan, I’ll have graduated—a bit of reflecting on reflecting makes sense.

Keeping such a public “diary” taught me more than I expected. The first lesson that comes to mind is that while my natural tendency is to forget and move forward, doing so can result in me losing some special moments. While looking ahead usually is a good thing, so is—sometimes—pausing to consider the past. Specifically, I’ve found value in reflecting on the challenges I’ve faced, what’s been helpful, what’s been unhelpful, and those moments of connection that have brought

me closer to the people who matter most to me.

For example, last week I was walking down the street with Anna on our way to pick up our daughter from daycare. It was around 6:00 pm. On our way, we ran into one of my fellow PGY-2s walking with his wife to the hospital to start a night shift on trauma. It brought me back to three years ago, when I too would walk with Anna to the hospital before a night shift. She would walk me there every night, wish me good luck, and say goodbye until morning. It was the calm before the storm. Seeing my coresident and his wife reminded me of a part of my life I had nearly forgotten. At the time, those moments with Anna were so essential to my well-being. It saddened me to think that, amidst the craziness of residency, I had forgotten about those simple walks together that steadied me before entering the trauma clubhouse.

“Residency Diary” has been a helpful avenue to explore the interactions and moments in residency I would have otherwise forgotten. So much has happened in the last five years: getting married, enduring the pandemic, transitioning from a junior resident to a senior resident, learning new skills, navigating fatherhood. I’m grateful that “Residency Diary” gave me an outlet and an excuse to step away from my focus on the future and reflect, albeit briefly, on the immediate past.

Reflection has been hard, but that’s just the first part of the process. Translating reflection into text has

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been its own struggle. As someone who mostly reads and writes in orthopaedic lingo, reflective writing brings me out of my comfort zone. It's more intuitive to draft up a "Statistical Analysis" section of a manuscript than it is to write about how I *feel* about something. This has been a process, and something that I have continued to struggle with over the course of this column.

Part of the reason for that difficulty (and this should come as a surprise to no one) is that there are some things that aren't appropriate for a public diary. Finding the line between what I felt comfortable and not comfortable putting into the diary has been the hardest part about this, even harder

than intentionally taking time to reflect.

Some columns came easier than others. Writing about issues outside of residency, like becoming a dad or dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, came naturally. Writing about intra-residency issues—like tough interactions with colleagues, personal and technical struggles—has been challenging. Some of my hardest moments in residency might have been appropriate to discuss with close friends over a beer. Putting them out into the world is a different story.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about this column is that people really did read it. Every so often, someone will mention my most recent "diary

entry." The ensuing conversation about their thoughts on the topic—parenting, navigating leadership in residency, or something else—has proven to be an unexpected, yet welcome, surprise.

As I near the end of residency and write my final "Residency Diary," I do wonder: Will I reflect like this in the future now that the column is done? I certainly hope so. Despite the struggles of reflecting and translating those reflections into words, it's been well worthwhile. Writing these diary entries has given me a sense of peace about residency. I can look back on residency and know that every few months, I took a step back and thought critically about what I have seen, done, and learned.