

## Heeding those voices in your head

**W**ould you like fries with that?" It's hard to ignore the voice inside my head. I filter about 99% of what it says (which I am sure is surprising to those who know me well), but sometimes things slip out. By the way, just in case you are wondering, the above is not an appropriate response to a patient's litany of complaints. Neither is, "Why don't you just shut up?" or, "Would you like some cheese to go with that whine?"

Sometimes the things I let slip can go over well... with the right patient. For example, "Bob, have you noticed that we have an unequal relationship?"

"What do you mean Doctor?"

"Well, it is always about your needs? It's always you, you, you. It's never about me or my needs."

"Oh, Dr Dave, you make me laugh."

I'm not suggesting that all of you let your inside voice out (come on, you all know you have one) but perhaps we should give it more credit. The voice that encourages me to go, "Goochy goo" when examining someone's axillae or "I am going to pump you up" (with Austrian accent) when taking blood pressures is also often the voice of reason. I have learned in over 20 years of practice that this voice is frequently trying to tell me something important apart from, "don't pass gas in the exam room."

On more than one occasion I have ignored my inner voice at my patient's peril. We are often so busy and distracted that we easily miss the symptom or sign that should have triggered our interest. So many pressures pull from all directions that we gloss over some important detail—and then there it comes, "the voice." "Slow down," it says. "Pay attention," it cajoles. "Something isn't right," it affirms. If I take the time to register these words and

heed their advice I am always thankful. My inner voice has helped me make diagnoses of potentially dangerous conditions that I might have otherwise

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missed. I would like to tell you that I have never made a mistake, but then I would be lying (and on my way to a career in politics). I sometimes try to

ignore my inner voice when it wakes me up repeatedly during the night: "Go back, check again," it niggles. I try to allay my discomfort with platitudes and clichés. I tell myself that it couldn't be, or that condition is so rare that I must be imagining things. One time, after a nighttime nagging session from my inner voice I fell asleep only to dream that my laboring patient was an unrecognized breech—a fact that was confirmed in the morning with an ultrasound. Oh, that damn voice.

We are taught that voices in our head aren't really a good thing, but I beg to differ. I would encourage you to get in touch with yours and heed its advice.

—DRR

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## Live the dream

I was in the gym the other day and ran into a piano teacher who remembered me from a few years ago when I took part in a recital at her home. These recitals took place twice a year and were a source of anxiety for me, as I have always had difficulty performing in public. At the recitals, we all had to play one of our own compositions. Composing is a daunting task, and playing in front of an audience even more so, but I eventually came to approach these performances with less trepidation and actually began to enjoy them. That said, I stopped taking lessons, mainly because of time constraints. I've regretted the decision ever since, as it was something I really enjoyed, despite the challenges.

John Lennon, in his song "Beautiful Boy," sang, "Life is what happens

to you while you are busy making other plans." How true. It got me thinking about other things I would like to do but haven't—my "bucket list" as it were. I can say that I have achieved some of the things on my list, but there are many others that have eluded me. I make all sorts of excuses—lack of time, money, expertise, or talent. In some cases these are valid excuses, but I believe that some of it is just reluctance to get out there and go for it, whatever the reason.

Rather than use the format of the Proust Questionnaire, I thought I would share a few of my top wishes that encompass my love for travel, nature, exercise, music, and animals. One could construe these as being more selfish than selfless, and perhaps that's true, but these are simply musings about what might or could be.

I was born in Nairobi, Kenya. My father was a physician in the British Army there. I left when I was 2 years old, too young to remember anything about it, but I have always held a fascination for anything African. I was to take an extended trip to Africa with my father to all the places he and my mother had been to and loved, and particularly to the game parks and animal sanctuaries they had visited while there. It was in the planning stages, but unfortunately he became too ill with prostate cancer to travel. My wish is to go there someday, to see for myself the places my parents have talked about and photographed, and, if health permits, climb Mount Kilimanjaro.

As an avid (albeit amateur) cyclist, I would love to ride some of the Tour de France routes. This would, I think, satisfy my desire to experience some of the most difficult cycling terrain in some of the most beautiful regions of Europe. Sampling the local cuisines and wines would be an added bonus.

Music, in all forms, is a big part of

my life thanks to the influence of my parents. I love to sing and have been part of a small local choir, but I would be thrilled to sing in a large one. Whether I would ever pass an audition is another question! To add to that, if I could ever master one musical instrument, the piano or cello would be my choice.

When I retire, and that day seems to be looming ever closer, I would like to live in a small cottage on or overlooking the ocean, have a large garden, and spend my days roaming the beach, listening to the music of the sea, and reading books of all kinds with my partner and dog by my side.


Whether I will realize any of these accomplishments remains to be seen, and may in large part depend on the degree of my desire, my health, and whether I have the finances to carry them out. Even if I am able to see one or two of them come to pass I would be content. But I can always dream!

—SEH

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