

Proust questionnaire: Dr Bruce Phillips



What profession might you have pursued, if not medicine?

Radio broadcast journalism. Specifically, compiling and reading the news on public radio.

Which talent would you most like to have?

The ability to write stories that move readers emotionally and allow them to see life in astonishingly different ways.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

As a person of color, my move to Canada from Apartheid South Africa was a spiritual revelation.

Who are your heroes?

People around the world who shoulder the burden of grinding poverty with quiet dignity and grace.

Dr Phillips works as a full-time pediatrician in the BC Children's Hospital emergency department.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Being in a quiet shady garden with a glass of wine, contemplating new growth.

What is your greatest fear?

Losing my faculties and becoming a burden to myself, those close to me, and to society.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

My inability to plan my life.

What characteristic do your favorite patients share?

As a pediatrician, I admire those parents who silently, by their mere presence and subtle body language, impart a sense of security and confidence to their children.

Which living physician do you most admire?

Dr Hilton Ling. He was there as the cool role model staff guy when I was doing my surgical rotation as a fresh-faced intern in South Africa. He operated on my brother's hemorrhoids. He was here 30 years later, operating on my spouse's heart at St. Paul's. Thinner of hair but still the cool dude.

What is your favorite activity?

Working in an overplanted, overgrown garden with shady moist spots for moss and ferns. And maybe a glass of wine after.

Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

"Amazing!" Multiple times a day, but as a tribute to my life—never without

really feeling the emotion that goes with it!

What is your favorite place?

A quiet secret clearing in Stanley Park near the tennis courts. A shady tree in a pool of sun, perfect with a book on a summer's day.

What do you most value in your colleagues?

Kindness, respect, empathy, and the feeling that I belong to an intimate family at work.

What are your favorite books?

Rediscovering Charles Dickens and his exquisite use of language and plot. Anything by Salman Rushdie.

What is your greatest regret?

Arriving late to meet my parents at the airport on their visit to Vancouver from South Africa. It was their very first time flying, half a world away from where they started. I found them eventually—huddled, bewildered, and exhausted, and relieved to see me.

What is the proudest moment of your career?

I feel pride every time a learner expresses appreciation for having a comfortable, safe learning environment, which I attempt to provide for them, and seeing them flourish.

How would you like to die?

With acceptance, grace, and dignity.