

Students and Faculty Doing Amazing Things

The Jefferson family—students, residents, fellows, alumni, faculty and staff—is special in so many ways. There are the day-in and day-out acts conducted in the course of training, discovering and caring and, occasionally, the virtual miracles performed, most often unheralded.

There are the special, above-and-beyond things that occur, as well as initiatives and programs that showcase our institution's transformative prowess. And then there are the occasional out-of-the-ordinary acts that catch the attention of outsiders and offer a glimpse of our very special Jefferson grit.

I make a habit of collecting the sundry uplifting anecdotes that find their way to my desk. Hard to choose among them, but let me share a random few.

Let's start with two 2015 SKMC graduates, Daniel Becchi and Monica Pham, who, during their fourth-year global health rotation, happened to be in Nepal when the devastating earthquake struck. By a stroke of luck, the wing of the building they occupied remained untouched.

Having made it to the international airport to head home, the two chanced upon a traveler in dire distress. Their Jefferson training kicked in, with an impressive display of clinical acumen. After ABC resuscitation steps, Daniel and Monica obtained a history with the help of a translator. Forming an impressive differential, they surmised that this individual was experiencing a hypoglycemic episode

from dehydration and malnutrition, complicated by a seizure. On-the-fly innovation followed. With the patient's swallowing function impaired, they applied a cloth, soaked in oral rehydration solution, to the patient's mouth—two medical students pulling a cat out of the hat on the other side of the planet.

A few years earlier, in that very same part of the world, another one of our own proved her mettle. Twelve days before graduating, Erin Lally, MD '11, became the 177th woman to summit Mount Everest. In my graduation remarks that year, I showcased Erin's tremendous feat, which built upon all kinds of other mountaineering exploits juggled with medical school demands. But what I didn't share at the time was what happened on the way down.

Shortly upon arriving back at Camp IV, after more than 20 hours of her own taxing descent from the Everest summit, Erin's team was informed that 15 Spanish climbers were unaccounted for. Hours of a painstaking search on the upper reaches of the mountain led her team's Argentinian guides and sherpas to four of the missing climbers. The victims were carried and dragged all the way to Camp II, roughly 3,000 vertical feet from where they had been found, to a makeshift triage tent.

Erin kicked in. Though exhausted from the prior day's efforts, under close radio communication with emergency room physicians at Base Camp, this fourth-year medical student managed to thaw bottles of saline, set up IVs and administer steroids, heparin and oxygen to climbers suffering from cerebral edema, pulmonary edema, severe frostbite and hypoxia. Stabilized overnight, they were then transported to Kathmandu with what became

one of the highest helicopter rescue missions in history. Erin, one of our own, soon became somewhat of a legend in the mountaineering community, with our medical school front and center.

Erin later wrote: “My summiting Everest taught me that there is no feat that is insurmountable or dream that is unattainable. By simply putting one foot in front of the other, the world has no limits.”

It's not just our medical students who rise to the occasion. Heading home on the 7:25 p.m. train out of Jefferson Station in May 2012, Howard Weitz, one of our renowned cardiologists and a 1978 graduate, overheard the conductor twice asking the person behind him for her pass. But no response—so the conductor yelled out for a doctor. Howard spun around, and detecting no pulse or breathing, pulled her to the floor, started chest compressions and instructed the conductor to call for assistance. Two more passengers responded—none other than Simeon (“Kosi”) Yamoah, a then-resident in radiation oncology, and a Jefferson nurse (anonymous by request), armed with a personal airway device.

Howard supervised the CPR efforts, with Kosi performing compressions and our nurse assisting in the breathing. The collapsed woman came back to life, awake and alert, 15 minutes after the ordeal began. Jefferson teamwork was on full display—serendipity bringing a random group of our own together, on a moving commuter train.

Lifesaving stories of heroism abound. But, sometimes, it's in the form of biomedical discovery that has impact across continents. Micaela Collins, Class of 2019, as a co-principal

investigator on a Canadian-funded project, has designed a breast milk pasteurization device that, along with feeding counseling programs and breast pumping stations, is being trialed in a garment factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh, to accommodate female workers who often have no choice but to return to work three months after giving birth. Most don't have access to any sort of refrigeration—hence the need to introduce an alternative way to keep



Sherrard, MD '15, who won the 2013 Ironman 70.3 World Championships in Las Vegas and placed fourth in the 2014 Ironman World Championships in Kona, Hawaii, in her 25-29 age group. Or the likes of Edward Liu, MD '90, who sacrificed his life a few years ago, saving two 12-year-old boys toppled from their canoe by Lake Michigan's riptide current. This prominent pediatric surgeon managed to help the boys make it to shore, but was himself pulled down by the undertow. Their stories inspire.

Each day, as I traverse the halls and walkways of our campus, I stop and remind myself of just how very special the people surrounding me are. We have incredible people capable of doing incredible things—so often with little fanfare. How uplifting, in a world too filled with disturbance and tragedy.

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breast milk safe when stored at room temperature for extended periods. Micaela was invited to pitch the project at the Pneumonia Innovations Summit sponsored by the United Nations.

I could go on, mining my files for more anecdotes of very special Jefferson people—lifesaving heroes or medical discoverers. And none of this speaks to the many personal triumphs or acts of selflessness—like those of Emily