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Re: Round Robin Letter

August 31, 2003

Fellow Academicians,

I have been a little delayed in writing this in hopes of doing so in light of our anticipated attendance at the upcoming Academy meeting in Williamsburg. However, such is not to be the case. Holley and I will be unable to attend this year, in spite of the added allure of its being so close to "Home". We regret this very much, and will miss you all, and send our best wishes for a productive and socially fruitful meeting.

Holley is doing more and more in art. She hosts a Monday morning and a Wednesday night class for artists chosen from all over Greater Boston, taught (in the studio in our home) by her mentor, Robert Cormier, one of the remaining disciples of the R.H. Ives Gammel school. Her portraits, still lifes and landscapes are all benefitting from her ongoing exposure with the other artists.

Eben IV is returning to Proctor Academy in Andover, NH, for his second year there (10th grade) where he is volunteering as a student leader on the 5-day orientation hike for new students up in the White Mountains. He will play varsity Football this fall, and hopefully keep up the strong academic performance which he demonstrated last year. In May his Biology class visited me at UMass where they all got to observe a craniotomy from the overhead gallery. Several students (including Eben IV) expressed a whole-hearted interest in learning "the craft"!

Bond, now 5.5 years old, has had a great summer spending time with his older brother, and is headed into Kindergarden at Charles River School in Dover, Mass. He doesn't seem to think that that is enough

of an achievement, for he keeps telling people he is going into "First Grade", then gives me a disdainful look when I point out that he WILL be doing THAT, in another year.

The last two years at UMass-Memorial Health Care in Worcester have been most instructive. After 15 years at the Brigham & Womens and Childrens' Hospitals in Boston, moving 30 miles west was a much bigger move, in many ways, than I had anticipated. The lack of a residency program (lost ~6 years ago) made a huge difference. We had a strong cadre of nurse practitioners (NPs) and physicians assistants (PAs) to help in getting all of the work done, but I found myself really missing the opportunity to teach residents. Teaching NPs and PAs was different - in some ways better, in that they might be around a long time and the investment would have a practical benefit, but the excitement of knowing that one's efforts might result in significant contributions to the future of neurosurgery through the "next generation" was clearly lacking.

The relative resource "poverty" has been another shock. UMass was going through major restructuring when I moved there, with numerous cuts in personnel and programs. Much of that is still going on, not so much at an institutional level as at a departmental level, with Dr. Dana Andersen coming from Yale recently and making his own readjustments within the Department of Surgery. The institution has had three major changes in the highest levels of health care administration even since I arrived, and the lack of continuity at the top has been problematic for us in neurosurgery. Promises made and commitments based on our strong, reliable productivity get lost in the transitions. One wastes a lot of time reaffirming our importance to each new arrival at the top. This translates into a significant lack in financial resources when new "Cuts" are the order of the day. This has certainly contributed to my having to refuse several invitations: to give talks at meetings in the last two years, including my inability to attend the Academy meeting in Williamsburg.

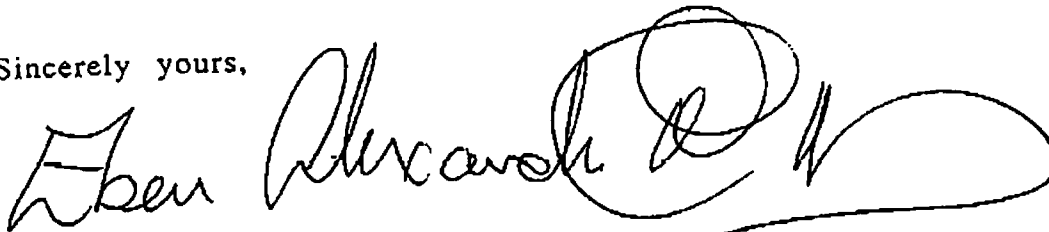
One unfortunate general effect of the resource scarcity is general havoc wreaked on academic work. There is very little money to pay quality secretaries, much less for research assistants and other help in the clinical realm. A tremendous amount of my time has been spent in taking care of patients (the NPs and PAs can do a lot, but our current group of relatively new people are much less effective than residents in helping to run ORs), and there is no time left over

for clinical research and academic pursuits. UMass says they want to be a top ten academic institution in the next five years, but they are woefully short on resources to try to make such a dream come true.

Given the current frustrating climate at UMass, with little hope for change in sight, I am entertaining other options for an innovative "new" career in neurosurgery and would love to discuss possible options with any of you who have something in mind.

Here's to a wonderful meeting in Williamsburg!! We will be there in spirit, if not in body, and look forward to seeing you all the following year at the Academy meeting.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eben Alexander III". The signature is fluid and includes a large, decorative flourish at the end.

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