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*My Gym Genie: Gathering Inspiration from Dr. John Schiller*

I remember the first time I met Dr. John Schiller. I was interviewing for a PhD program at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The morning's interview hadn't gone well, and I just knew I wouldn't get into the program. I had dreamed of training at the NIH, of discovering a druggable target for neurodegenerative diseases, but now I had to go back in and pretend that those dreams weren't slipping away. Sitting down for the interview lunch, I never expected to be across the table from someone who had effectively cured a disease that plagued my childhood, someone who would one day become a mentor to me. I sat down across from Dr. John Schiller and was immediately thrown back in time.

I was back in elementary school, sitting on Mrs. Gazeley's waterbed on my tenth birthday playing *Sorry* and watching *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. I knew she did not have much time left. I just did not know how little.

I do not remember when I first learned of HPV. Trying to pinpoint the date is like trying to figure out the first time I read a chapter book. I can ballpark a period of time, but the exact date seems inconsequential because once I learned, it just became part of everyday life – a chapter a day. In my memory, Mrs. Gazeley, my mom's best friend and a constant in my childhood, had always had cervical cancer. She had had it in college, and it was back. At the time, I did not understand how she got it, but I knew it was not something she wanted to have. It meant days spent getting chemotherapy at the Oregon Health and Science University. It meant losing her hair. It meant dying.

Until it did not. Two years after Mrs. Gazeley's death, Gardasil became FDA approved as a preventative measure for HPV and therefore cervical cancer. My mom, usually someone to stay away from any medicine that is not tried and true, had my sister and me first in line at our pediatrician's office for the vaccine. We were not going to experience what her friend had gone through, not if she could help it. I remember the three shots making my arm sore for days, but each time we went, I knew I was preventing a disease that had both broken me and made me committed to helping people suffering from incurable diseases.

So, as I returned to lunch that day, I realized that I was meeting a great. I was meeting John Schiller, the man who had helped discover and develop the vaccine that protected me from a similar fate to Mrs. Gazeley. I was meeting someone that had accomplished the purest goal in biomedical science – bringing a discovery to people and preventing disease.

Despite my earlier fears, a few months later I found myself a graduate student at the NIH. I was constantly seeing legends of science around campus from Tony Fauci to Steven Rosenberg. No scientist, however, inspired me quite like John Schiller. Occasionally, I would see him at the tiny, windowless campus gym. He always had a smile on his face. Perhaps it was the endorphins, but I liked to think it was just his disposition. Dr. Schiller would ask me how the science was going. As

a first year PhD student, the science was going about how trudging through half melted snow goes – difficult and sloppy. Dr. Schiller, though, would always take a minute and offer his thoughts on whatever idea or hypothesis I was toying with that day. He was my gym genie but instead of offering wishes, he was giving me ideas and advice on how to be a good scientist.

Like any PhD, mine has been fraught with obstacles – mentors lost, projects scooped. Many days I find myself thinking is it all worth it? Will my science ever help people, or is it destined to sit in PubMed for eternity, occasionally cited, but mostly forgotten? I did not start an 8-year path to become a physician-scientist for this, I think to myself. Then I remember John Schiller. I remember his gym words of wisdom on selecting problems that really matter, coming up with a solution, and knowing when to hand a discovery off to the next person in the pipeline to develop. I remember that the goal is always to help patients, not our own egos. I remember John Schiller, who is to me, everything that a scientist should be. He recognizes that science is a team sport. He is focused on improving human health. He is a mentor. I remember John Schiller, and I remember that I, too, can achieve my dreams of making a difference in people's lives through science.