

A Random Poem About Tulips – WCI Scholarship 2018 4th Place

Fourth place in the 2018 White Coat Investor Scholarship contest goes to Nate Alder, the first student from [MY medical school](#) to win a prize in the WCI Scholarship contest. I couldn't be more proud.

Fourth place in the contest was good for \$2,000 cash plus a copy of [The White Coat Investor: A Doctor's Guide to Personal Finance and Investing](#) for every member of Nate's class. He will also get his choice of either [Fire Your Financial Advisor](#) (\$499 value) or the [2018 Physician Wellness and Financial Literacy Conference](#) (\$299 value).



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Despite the fact that doctors spend 11-14 years in the “medical training pipeline,” life goes on. Babies are born, family members die, illnesses show up, hardships occur, and successes appear. A long-time reader will note Nate's story has some parallels to those of past scholarship winners as well as to my own. Like one of our honorable mentions, Nate went a bit poetic for this submission. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

A Random Poem About Tulips

Nothing,

Is what we would hear.

“No heartbeat,” she would say.

Another baby lost,

On another snowy day.

But,

“A heartbeat,” she said,

“And another one makes two!”

Our nightmares and our wildest dreams,

In nine months, were coming true.

Our budget

Had a good long laugh,



Nate Alder and family

When we doubled everything.

“You can’t afford twins,” it seemed to say;

This budget we'd been worshipping.

Until this point

We had no debt,

Not even for tuition.

For my dear wife, so diligent,

Made this budget her life mission.

Before med school, she taught-

My wife-

Taught children in first grade.

It didn't make sense, how hard she worked,

For how little she got paid.

Eventually,

With her frugality,

We saved enough for my first year.

Her saving and my planning

Weakened debt's inherent fear.

Now,



Fast forward to the present,

And our story can resume.

Sitting there with my wife,

Two babies in her womb.

Two

Tiny babies

With their two tiny lips;

Our tiny little tulips,

And a budget apocalypse.

“Please,”

I know you’re thinking,

“Don’t make this poem longer.”

And so I’ll switch to narrative,

To make my plea seem stronger.

So there we were, my wife and I, sitting at our computer, looking at our budget. I remember the day well because it was the day we found out we were having twins, but also it was our

second wedding anniversary. I remember my wife saying, "As long as we have enough money for food, I don't care."



Let me tell you about my wife. She is the sixth in a military family of nine children, which could justify her tireless work ethic, meticulous organization, and need for so little. We got married a year and a half before I started medical school, and she taught first grade while I finished my undergraduate studies. Almost every penny not spent on rent or groceries went directly into our savings account. When we moved for medical school she found an office job, and a second job cleaning the office after hours. I was halfway through my first year when we found out about the twins (who were preceded by a devastating miscarriage). My sweet wife didn't buy any maternity clothes her entire pregnancy. She would say, "Well I made it this far, why would I buy some now?" She kept working both jobs until eventually I had to persuade her boss to "fire" her from the after-hours cleaning job. She kept working in the office until only a few weeks before her delivery date.

My wife doesn't like making budgets, and she's not crazy about Excel. She simply doesn't spend money on anything (ANYTHING) that we don't need. She was given a little money for Christmas a year ago, and she spent it on rent. For her birthday, she received a little more money which I gently forbade her from spending on rent. She spent it on rent. I finally had to tell the gift-givers to only give her gift cards, so the money couldn't be spent on rent.

There is no better teammate than my wife. I say teammate not only because we met playing basketball, but because our differing skills have allowed us financial victories unachievable on our own. With my budgeting and planning, and my wife's endless resolve, we made it through my entire first year of medical school with zero debt.

By the summer after my first year, the savings money was gone, my wife had quit her job, and in July our twin girls were born. All of this meant one thing: debt. Fortunately, by this time I had been reading the [White Coat Investor blog](#) for years. I had made several spreadsheets on Excel breaking down our loans, interest, budget...everything. We were ready. Based on [a WCI blog post](#), we opened a couple of 0% interest credit cards to pay for the next semester's tuition. I applied to every [scholarship](#) for which I was remotely eligible, and I even won a few! I also started a part-time job as an academic coach and tutor to other medical students. Eventually though, loans were inevitable.

Now, here we are, almost two years from where our story began. I'm in my third year of medical school, our girls just turned one, and we don't have any more debt than we need. My wife makes a meal calendar every week, takes both girls to the store to buy groceries (pushing the stroller with one hand while pulling the shopping cart with the other), and makes dinner every night. She refuses to "waste" money on our haircuts, so she taught herself how to cut hair. When our vacuum broke, she watched videos until she could take it apart and fix it herself. I could go on and on, but instead, I'll conclude.

In many ways, having debt has been similar to having twins. They were both scary at first, and as they grow each year they get a little scarier. But with planning, teamwork, and complete dedication, we have no reason to fear.