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My first meeting with Dr. Judy Frank was supposedly a job interview, but it seemed more like cheerleading practice. “Great!” and “Terrific!” were the chorus of our conversation. She was “thrilled” that I was interested in doing research the summer after my first year at Dartmouth Medical School. And instead of quizzing me about my strengths, weaknesses, and five-year career plan, she clapped and cheered, then outlined the research project and said, “Let’s start right away!” It seemed wise to agree. With that, she tucked me under her wing for a summer of research, rounding in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), and absorbing her approach to the complicated business of being a woman in medicine.

Super: Judy Frank was clearly no ordinary woman in medicine. Her office felt like a cozy beachfront condo, with wicker shelves, a seashell-rimmed mirror, a comfortable love seat, and a shameless display of family photos. Her interview style was effervescent rather than interrogative. She seemed fascinated by my nontraditional path into medicine. “You were a ranch hand? Hooray for you!” When I expressed interest in shadowing her on rounds, that was “Super! Come every day!” She immediately invested in my learning, and I seemed exempt from having to prove myself. I was a superstar, apparently.

I started many days that summer following Judy on rounds. I had a hard time keeping up with her quick, determined stride. As she sailed into the NICU, I felt proud to be alongside her. She had picked me! She thought I was terrific! One in a million!

But what I saw in the NICU seemed to belie Judy’s cheerfulness. This was my first glimpse into the world of micro-preemies, neonatal seizures, chromosomal defects, and heart malformations. Caring for these infants—the sickest, smallest babies imaginable—seemed depressing. But “depressing” wasn’t a word in Judy’s vocabulary.

Hooray: Instead, she approached each bedside with a keen eye for the accomplishments of the day. “Gained 18 grams! Super! Weaning off oxygen! Hooray!” If something wasn’t going well, she let it be known that “We’ll work on this.” She knew her team was devoted to managing all the critical details of sustaining these fragile lives. She also had a way of nurturing the infants’ anxious families. No matter how grim a situation seemed, Judy stayed positive and determined.

As the summer passed, I came to realize how her constant positivity must have sustained her through her journey in medicine. She had been one of only five women in her class in medical school. This was unthinkable to me. I had just finished a difficult year, during which



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published researcher. She was an amazing cook. She was always zipping off to a party, to Nantucket, to take in a show. She seemed to have what many of us dream of: a rich professional career, a beautiful family, a life full of music and joy. Other women in medicine seemed constantly torn between work and home. But rather than see life as filled with demands, she saw it as filled with engagement—there was not a moment to be missed!

I began to wonder, that summer, how Judy did it all. Where did she get the *energy*? One day I asked her. The exchange went like this:

Me: Wow, Judy, how did you manage being pregnant during residency? I can’t imagine that was common then.

Judy: I had a friend in Laundry who kept bringing me bigger scrubs!

Me: How did you raise three children while practicing medicine?

Judy: I had a lot of brownie mix in the pantry!

Me: How do you have time for everything you do?

Judy: I drive fast!

Answers: So while I was looking for philosophical insights, she gave me simple, practical answers. She was saying that the path for a woman in medicine didn’t have to be a metaphysical challenge. You didn’t have to struggle every day with “How do I do all of this?” You just had to *do* it. I learned from her that being a wife, a mother, a friend, a daughter, and a woman in medicine was a privilege, a great adventure. Super! Terrific! You just had to see it that way.

Later, of course, I learned I’m not one in a million. Many times I have said, “Judy was a special mentor to me,” and heard the response, “Me, too!” She opened doors for so many of us, infused us with a sense of belief, of possibility. No one celebrated my accomplishments quite like Judy did. Ever since her death last September, I have missed having her there to cheer me on—and I know I am far from alone.

I have to confess that I haven’t yet perfected Judy’s technique. I sometimes feel exhausted by doctoring and mothering. I don’t always feel thoroughly enthusiastic. But on the days when I don’t, I have a plan. I say “You bet!” to things that I see no time for. I say “Hooray for you!” at my children’s smallest accomplishments. I say “Terrific!” when a friend wants to drop in on my perpetually messy home. And if you see me speeding by to pick up some brownie mix, you’ll know who taught me that trick. Does it work? You bet! ■

The Point of View essay provides a personal perspective on some issue in medicine or science. Nordgren, a 1999 graduate of DMS, did her residency in pediatrics at DHMC. She is currently on the staff of the Cholesterol Treatment Center at Concord, N.H., Hospital and is also a member of the DARTMOUTH MEDICINE Editorial Board.