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**A Woman Who Does it All**

*Kiana Reaves*

Every night, I stayed up on the couch, my eyes glued to action movies to ward off the exhaustion that was slowly creeping up on me. As the oldest sibling, I felt it was my duty to stay awake until my mother made it home safely, especially given the distressing crime rate in our neighborhood, where robberies and murders were all too common. She typically left work around 12:30 a.m. and didn’t return until 1:00 a.m. Despite needing to wake up at 5:00 a.m. for school, it didn’t matter. I could only find peace in knowing she was safe and sound.

When she finally arrived home, she always did her best to slip in as quietly as possible, not wanting to disturb anyone. But no matter how discreet she tried to be, our eyes would inevitably lock as soon as she entered. A soft smile would spread across her face as she greeted me with a warm hug, trying to hide the exhaustion that followed her like a dark cloud. Yet, I could

always tell it was there after a full shift. I could see the weight of her fatigue in her eyes and the quiet weariness behind her smile. She was drained, overwhelmed by the relentless demands of working one nursing job late into the night and waking up early for another. But she had no choice. She had to keep going, to provide for my siblings and I, no matter the toll it took on her.

 Despite her long days and even longer nights, my mother never let her demanding schedule stop her from being deeply involved in the lives of myself and my siblings. She managed to be at every basketball game, band concert, and track meet, cheering loudly in the stands for all three of us. She took us to theme parks, planned and threw the best birthday parties, and was always there for the moments when a child just needs their mom to hold them and tell them that everything is going to be okay. She laughed with us, watched movies with us, and took us shopping. She was always present. Her commitment to her family was her form of therapy. Finding joy in being with us helped ease the burden of her demanding schedule. This balance allowed her to be an exceptional mother, but also contributed to her reputation as an outstanding nurse.

 Not only did my siblings and I see my mother as a caring, compassionate woman who was always there for us, but so did her patients. She often shared stories about going above and beyond to help them and how grateful and appreciative they were. Whenever we met her coworkers, they would sing her praises, expressing their gratitude for having a supervisor who genuinely cared about and stood up for them. She was known for seeing the humanity in even the most challenging patients and staff, always advocating for them to the fullest extent. Though the demands of working two jobs were exhausting, she was always determined to give her patients her best because nursing was, undoubtedly, her calling. Being a present and engaged parent provided her with the balance she needed to bring her best self to work every day, ensuring that she could continue to care for others with the same commitment and compassion she showed at home.

 Loved by everyone who knew her, both personally and professionally, my mother had an incredible ability to be fully present in every aspect of her life, and her lifestyle wholeheartedly defines what work-life integration means to me. Simply put, I believe work-life integration is the ability to be the best version of yourself at work and at home while never losing your sense of self. It’s not just a goal to strive for but a necessary step in the physician training process, one that allows us to be the people our patients, families, and we ourselves deserve. It is the glue that holds together a woman’s sanity as both a doctor and a person. Work-life integration is the ability to set healthy boundaries without compromising your values and humanity in every area of your life. It’s a skill that can make or break our experience in medicine, and in our life. Like my mother, we have chosen a career that can be exhausting and overwhelming, but work life integration gives us the tools we need to persevere.

 As a future physician, and as a woman, I recognize that achieving work-life integration is not without its challenges. One of the greatest obstacles is the normalized culture of overwork and self-sacrifice in medicine. This culture glorifies productivity at the expense of personal wellbeing, expecting women to work through late stages of pregnancy, push through debilitating menstrual symptoms, and spend more time away from their families than with them. Such expectations inevitably lead to burnout, mental health struggles, and physical consequences if left unchallenged.

 I hope to be a changemaker for the future of women in healthcare by advocating at all levels for a shift away from this toxic reality. Currently, I am part of a mental health support program for healthcare employees and students, with a goal of creating a medical school system that prioritizes mental well-being for all medical students through strong support and constant action. As a resident, I plan to advocate for systemic changes through congressional outreach and demonstrate support for my peers through fostering healthy work-life integration within our program and hospital. Finally, as an attending physician, I will dedicate myself to ending this perpetuation of overwork and self-sacrifice. I will fight tirelessly for change to ensure that future generations of woman physicians have the opportunity to thrive both personally and professionally because it’s what we deserve.

**Biography**

Kiana Reaves, a third-year medical student at Florida State University College of Medicine, is from Miami, Florida. She earned her B.S. in Psychology from Florida A&M University and an M.S. in Biomedical Sciences from FSU. Passionate about serving underserved communities, Kiana has been actively involved in multiple organizations aimed at eradicating the stigma surrounding mental health care, particularly in minority communities. She believes that mental well-being is essential to overall health and is committed to improving access to mental health services for marginalized populations. Upon graduation, Kiana plans to specialize in psychiatry, focusing on addressing mental health disparities and providing compassionate, accessible psychiatric care.