

Not the Prescription I Expected

Category: Guts

written by Sara Ann Conkling | April 13, 2026

As I think back on that morning over 40 years ago, I'm pretty sure he was a medical student. I had come to the clinic weeks before after experiencing a sharp, intermittent pain in my stomach; I'd felt sure it was something that needed to be fixed. In part because I was attending a university with a well-known medical school, I'd been offered several tests to try to figure out what was wrong. All of the results were negative.

So now I found myself sitting across a table from a medical student who still had all of his curiosity and empathy intact. "Tell me a little about your life," he said.

I told him that I was working almost full-time to put myself through a school where most of the students came from wealthy families and therefore didn't have to work. I told him how I'd decided—since I was paying for school myself, by the semester—to cram as many classes as I could into each semester. I said I planned to graduate with a BA and a BS, and maybe a master's degree, too, in four years, while working and being president of the university choir and editor of the undergraduate business magazine. In my non-existent spare time, I was dancing ballet seriously and taking a class with the local ballet company downtown. None of this seemed to have anything to do with my gut.

"Do you have a boyfriend?" he asked. For a split second, I interpreted the question as nosiness. But I replied truthfully: "I'm seeing someone, and in many ways, he is perfect. He treats me well and has beautiful manners. He wants to have a more serious relationship, but I'm just not attracted to him."

"You have to get out of that relationship," he said. "Find a way to do it without hurting his feelings, and then come back to see me in a couple of weeks."

I proceeded to have a gut-wrenching conversation with the guy I was dating. I took all the blame on myself for the demise of our relationship, as I should have. Still, it was painful.

When I met with the medical student a couple of weeks later, I was able to report that, miraculously, my gut was cured.

I hope he became a gastroenterologist.

Sara Ann Conkling
Cocoa, Florida