



(left to right): Stephanie Masters, Michaela Pesce, Joowon Choi, and Caroline Woods

meet SORO'S MEDICAL STUDENTS

Today you're going to meet four medical students from VTCSOM (VA Tech Carilion School of Medicine) who have made their home here for the last four years. There are clusters of med students living amongst us, and now you're going to find out stories about one of those clusters.

Caroline Woods hails from Paeonian Springs, VA, near D.C. She is the oldest of three and she always knew that she wanted to be a doctor. She went to a STEM high school and then on to UVA. She will do her residency in internal medicine and then possibly specialize in geriatrics or cardiology. Every rotation makes her fall in love with that particular specialty. She's going to take her time to decide.

Joowon Choi went to the same high school as Caroline, although her hometown is Ashburn. She graduated from Williams, a small liberal arts college. Joowon was born in Arizona, and her parents were born in South Korea. She is an only child. She knows for sure that her residency will be in plastic

surgery. Reconstructive surgery and craniofacial issues appeal to her interest in science and her desire to help people. One of her patients was born without ears and was so thankful that she now had ears to hold up her mask!

Stephanie Masters was born in Annandale and is the middle of three sisters and a graduate of JMU. She first got interested in becoming a doctor when she watched *The Untold Stories of the ER*. Stephanie is going to be an OB/GYN.

Michaela Pesce is the youngest of three with two older brothers. Her hometown is Long Hill, NJ, and her mom is a nurse practitioner. She is a graduate of Notre Dame. She also will be an OB/GYN. Both Stephanie and Michaela will embrace midwives and doulas into their practices.

All of these young women have nothing but praises for their school, faculty, and the entire structure of the program. Their class totals 42 students, and the



Caroline Woods



Joowon Choi



Stephanie Masters



Michaela Pesce

small class size, the collaborative environment, the willingness of the faculty to listen to and incorporate students' ideas and innovations made it a perfect fit for each of them.

The way the school works is that the students apply and are interviewed. The first two years are classes; the third year is core rotations, such as internal medicine and pediatrics; and the fourth year is electives. There is a 10-12 week period when the students interview for their residency programs. At this time many are virtual, but in normal times it is a very expensive procedure as flights, hotels, food, etc., come out of their own pockets. There is no wining and dining like there is in corporate America.

In January 2020, when COVID-19 was just being whispered about, these young women were living in their own apartments – Ponce de Leon, above Fortunato, South 16, and the Lofts at West Station above Beamers. They decided to try to find a place to get together and lucked into the best house and most wonderful landlady who actually held the house for them for six months. They combined furniture, including a fabulous dining room table and chairs

bought for an outrageously low price on Craigslist, where they also found their house. Bikes, helmets, running shoes, and lab coats with embroidered names fill the space. Two friendly and very well-behaved 2-year-old puppies, Rocky and Kevin (named after the bird in *UP*), show love to all the girls equally.

Soon their classes went online and they formed their own bubble. Michaela's boyfriend, also a medical student in the same class and living with three other medical students, joined them to form their pod. They were all set. They could quarantine and enjoy it!

Their first board exam, which was by far the MOST important test of their lives, was delayed over and over. They had detailed study plans for each day. The school adjusted their schedules. They weren't allowed to see COVID patients, but they became part of the Medical Reserve Corps and volunteered every way they could. They gave vaccines at the Berglund Center. They made face shields. They wanted to be involved as much as possible.

When asked if the Pandemic had influenced their decisions to go into the medical field, their





Michaela, Stephanie, Caroline, and Joowan

overwhelming response was that it only validated their decisions, making them more determined than ever, and that they wanted to make a difference in people's lives. They noted the fact that the general public seemed to have more of an understanding and appreciation for what the medical community contributed. Michaela's mom worked in a COVID unit in NJ and had free food for five months from grateful people in the community.

After being with these young women and hearing

their passion for their chosen fields, the biggest takeaway was the absolute joy they radiated. They have embraced all things Roanoke and have a bucket list that is well on the way to being completed. Some of their favorite places and things to do include hiking Tinker Cliffs, bicycling on the Greenway, walking all over South Roanoke, going to the Mill Mountain Star, getting books from our e-library, baking (a persimmon loaf was on the table), and supporting local breweries. They also love to eat and the local spots that have caught their fancy are the Roanoke Weiner Stand, the Texas Tavern, Fork in the Alley, Bloom, Fortunato, Lucky, Sidecar, Tacos Rojas, RND Coffee Lounge, Bread Craft, Blue Cow, and Pops. Donnie D's bagels are the best and Ike's for ramen. They celebrate birthdays in a big way and have so much fun together. Their favorite place to shop is Plato's Closet – bargain clothes and gourmet food!

Caroline recently had a rotation at UCLA. Joowon was at Northwell Health in New York. Stephanie was at Cornell and Michaela was at Tufts.

The first piece of mail that came to their shared home was the *South Roanoke Living* magazine. They found out so much from the publication and remembered everyone's stories. Now they are cover girls, beautiful ones, and they are planning a "Cover Release Party" to celebrate the January 2022 issue.

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