On Writing

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Published online: 19 February 2018
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As Editor-in-Chief of this fine journal, I have read countless manuscripts. Some of these submissions have been extremely interesting while others have been rather pedestrian. Some have described innovative methods while others relied on more conventional approaches. Some have produced innovative findings while others produced replication, which is equally important and essential to our science. Some resulted in publication while others did not. One thing that they all had in common is that they were the result of a labor of love. They were the distillation of countless hours of work in the field and of hours of writing and rewrites. During my five years at the helm of this Journal, I have occasionally, and fleetingly, wondered why we write.

In one of my seminars on authorship and the peer review process, I identified some of the reasons for authorship. I have proselytized that, ideally, the reason that we write scientific manuscripts is to share research findings in the hope of improving the health of society. However, the more practical reasons an academic may desire to publish are to get funding, to get promoted, to get a job, to retain a job, and to let others know what we have been doing. What other reasons could there be? Could there be some deeper reason?

While I am no cultural anthropologist, it appears to me that writing is one of the latest evolutionary stages in communication. (I qualify this last comment since I do not know where “texting” may reside in this chain.) While it is enjoyable to get away from it all and to be alone with one’s thoughts, we are always drawn back to society. Man is a social animal. We need to interact. The deleterious effects of isolation are well known and include increased all-cause mortality, cardiovascular disease, and poorer mental health outcomes [1]. Communication is essential to life itself. Before there was the written word, there was the spoken word. While the oral tradition is largely part of “our” society’s past, it is still either the norm or plays a

strong role in some existent groups. Over the millennia, the oral tradition evolved to the written tradition. Initial stories of adventure and mythology, such as Beowulf, were supplemented with recordings of history and treatises of science and medicine. The earliest recorded medical texts, the Kahun Medical Papyrus, date back to Egypt around 2000 BC [2]. Both our means of communicating and our science have certainly evolved since then. We have gone beyond writing on papyrus with the printing press providing greater access to the populace and today’s electronic media providing even greater and more immediate access to information. What has not changed in the scientific literature is an attempt to convey ideas. Some ideas have gone on to become facts while others did not survive the trials of replication. More than 4000 years since these first medical texts, we continue to strive to unravel the mysteries of health and disease and to communicate these findings to our peers and the general public. Clearly, writing can educate, it can entertain, and, as I have discovered, it can heal. I would like to direct you all to visit the website Writing Through Cancer. Most recently, Sharon Bray discusses how writing can be a form of therapy which facilitates healing. As she so eloquently states “A cancer diagnosis—or many other traumatic life experiences, can make you feel as if you’re in the midst of a storm. You rage; you weep; you pour your emotions onto the page. Writing becomes the calm, the eye of a hurricane, a kind of refuge while the storm continues to howl around you.” [3]. Her own experience led her to lead writing workshops for individuals with cancer. Perhaps a worthwhile workshop for a future International Cancer Education Conference. She concludes her treatise with writing suggestions which includes “Write out of storm, or write about calm. It doesn’t matter. The whole sky is yours, the blank page is yours, a space for whatever you want to write. What matters most, is that you write.” I hope that this touches a chord with a reader who will share their own storm story and show us how we can better enable others to navigate their own storms through our role as cancer educators.

The Journal of Cancer Education (JCE) has endeavored to present the latest developments in cancer education. You, the

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readers, have benefited from learning of the trials and tribulations of others and building upon their findings have developed ever more refined and effective programs for patients, the public, and professionals. The JCE has been assisting cancer educators for over three decades. The JCE encountered many challenges in its early years but has grown from one that initially presented 250 pages a year to one that nearly equals that volume per issue. We have now begun the next phase of our journey where we will be publishing six issues per year. Greater opportunities for us to learn and greater opportunity for us to share our findings. I hope that the JCE continues to grow and prosper. It will be interesting to see what media will be employed thirty years from today.

In this issue, we continue with our Conversations by presenting one with an extraordinary mentor... Dr. Georgia Sadler. Georgia is well known to members of the American Association for Cancer Education being a regular fixture at the

annual meeting and a regular contributor, both as reviewer and author, to the JCE. I trust that you will all read and benefit from her sage comments.

Be well and keep communicating!

Arthur M. Michalek, PhD, FACE

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