

John J. Frey III, MD

2020 Writing Award Submissions





2020 John J. Frey III, MD Writing Awards—**Due September 25**

Purpose: To recognize and honor creative writing by faculty, residents, fellows, FMIG students, and staff in the UW SMPH Department of Family Medicine and Community Health (DFMCH), UW Health Family Medicine clinics, Aspirus (Wausau), Gundersen Health System (LaCrosse), ProHealth Care (Waukesha), Prevea (Eau Claire) and Aurora/St. Luke's (Milwaukee) Family Medicine Residency Programs.

Selection Criteria: The **John J. Frey III, MD Writing Awards** recognize outstanding contributions of writing in any genre. This includes, but is not limited to: editorials, essays, short stories, commentaries, poetry, and narratives. Writings need not have been published. Research articles, instructional materials, and novels are excluded from consideration.

Eligibility:

- All faculty, residents, fellows, project, classified, academic and university staff currently employed by the UW SMPH DFMCH.
- Faculty and staff currently employed by the UW Medical Foundation (UWMF) whose position is dedicated exclusively for work in the UW SMPH DFMCH and UW Health Family Medicine clinics. (Excludes students, LTE's, and UWMF faculty and staff not working in family medicine clinics.)
- Aspirus, Gundersen Health System, ProHealth Care, Prevea and Aurora/St. Luke's family medicine faculty, residents and staff.
- UW medical student members of the Family Medicine Interest Group (FMIG).

Number of Awards Presented: Will be determined by the selection committee.

Process:

- **Submissions:** There is a maximum of two submissions per person to be reviewed. Submissions will be solicited through department reminders/announcements. Anonymous submissions will not be accepted. Previous submissions will not be accepted. Submissions should be submitted sent to: suzanne.mcguire@fammed.wisc.edu
- **Materials:** All materials should be submitted as Word documents.
- **Deadline:** For 2020, the deadline is **September 25, 2020.**
- **Selection:** Previously published materials must include written permission from the publisher to post on the DFMCH internal website or a web link to a public version of the materials. Award recipients are selected by the UW SMPH DFMCH Awards Committee. All submissions are anonymous during the selection process. Submissions will be available for reading on the internal DFMCH website after the recipients have been announced.
- Winning submissions may be shared with UW SMPH Public Affairs and/or other UW entities for publicity purposes.

Poetry

1. After the Virus by James Bigham, MD MPH
2. BAKING IT THROUGH RESIDENCY by Markus Eckstein, MD
3. before the plague by Jonathan Temte, MD MPH
4. Twelve 55 word poems by Jonathan Rief, MD
 - Life is Now
 - Hard Days

Prose

5. Perspective by Joel Hill, PA-C
6. A Newsletter
7. Ode to a Clump
8. The City of Bezos
9. I've Learned
10. POA
11. The Lady in the Sunhat
12. Statistics are people too
13. Covid and the new normal
14. Your Diagnosis - An Open Letter to My Dad

After the Virus

James Bigham, MD, MPH

After the virus

We will hug and shake hands.

We will visit our friends and gather.

We will share space
without fear.

After the virus

Our world will be different.

Beloved ones will be gone.

Reality shifted by the price we are
made to pay.

After the virus

May we find healing.

Our priorities rearranged before us,
may we come to embody a loving community.

After the virus

Life will return.

Yet,

Empty spaces will echo our losses.

For all we lose,
may we realize a new richness.

During the virus

I hope I am healed

Of selfishness and fear

Of pride and self sufficiency

Of hoarding and hatred

So that

After the virus

I become

The very person I was made to be:

Broken, Humble, gracious

Loving, generous,

Present

BAKING IT THROUGH RESIDENCY

(A 55-word Narrative)

Markus Eckstein

I think of residency like the baking powder in a vanilla sponge cake.

One teaspoon for all that flour. Three years in an entire career.

Is it really so important?

Then again, vanilla gives the flavor, and there's only a drop of that in there.

No baking powder, no rise.

I hope my cake rises.

before the plague
Jon Temte, MD MPH

Before the plague
we congregated, we
chatted over gin & tonics
and iced whiskey about
estimated R-naught and the
price of a ticket
from Madison
to Beijing - \$550
with a stop in Detroit
I said.

Before the plague
at the Chancellor's manor
we snacked on
Heritage farm meatballs
and shrimp croquettes
congratulating ourselves on
our rapidly- assembled
panel
of experts

Who could not place
Wuhan on a
map or stumbled on
a pronunciation of
Hubei – where
if the rumors were true –
troops encircled the city.

Professors, emeriti, provosts and
deans gathered along
with those with suits
and stories –
a world away
children live the
theoretical constructs
abstract passages for
the January eve celebration
before the plague

Jonathan Rief, MD

Life is Now

I got married in medical school, always wanted four kids, had the names picked out before I met my wife. "We should have them right away. I'll be busy the next seven years but won't miss much, just babies." Then I held my son for the first time. It all changed.

Hard Days (Missing Time)

There are hard days. Usually not because of the work itself, but for what I'm missing. When I work 28 hours. When I leave before the boys get up, and return home after they go to bed. I may go 36 or even 46 hours without seeing my children, and no amount of money ever bought a second.

Perspective Joel Hill, PA-C

It is what our students that are studying the medical professions desire during their educational journey to prepare them to enter the clinical workforce.

Teaching about medical conditions, with its associated testing, diagnoses and various treatments is the core of medical education and often straight forward.

Perspective can be one of the most difficult knowledge pieces to provide as an educator, especially during a pandemic when there is no face to face activity, leaving students feeling socially isolated as their education takes a turn and they are required to learn from remote and socially isolated locations.

I was driving to an urgent care shift during the first month of the pandemic. I am faculty at an upper Midwestern PA Program, a job that I have been lucky enough to have for past decade that allows me the opportunity to practice clinically as well. As I was thinking about the upcoming shift and numerous respiratory conditions that were certain to fill the schedule, I began to wonder about some of our prior graduates, now practicing clinicians, and how they were faring in this new medical environment.

We have many graduates that stay in state or join practices in adjacent states. There are also a large number that start their clinical career farther away. I was wondering how those distant graduates were managing during this pandemic. As I thought about them, I wondered if our current didactic and clinical year students would be interested in a different perspective on COVID-19 from outside of our

region. The students were keenly aware of local, regional and national COVID news reports, but those reports seemed to have a different message each day and were dependent on many unrelated factors.

Our program stopped all face to face lectures for didactic students, moving to an online format. Second year students were pulled from clinical rotations, as was the case across much of the U.S. This all happened over their spring break, making the transition to virtual learning difficult for all. I asked those practicing clinicians to answer a few standard pandemic questions and add anything else that they would have thought pertinent when they were students.

I texted a few grads that I had current numbers for and messaged a few others through social media. I initially contacted an ED PA in upstate New York, an orthopedics PA in North Carolina, an oncology PA in Minnesota, a transplant PA in Texas, a rural family medicine PA in western Montana and dermatology PA in southern California.

The perspectives, though varied geographically, were also quite similar. There was organizational confusion and announcements that had different directives from day to day. There were shortages of PPE in all locations, with most clinicians being instructed to clean it and reuse their PPE. There were personal anxieties about coronavirus and the unknowns of this new contagion. There were concerns about families and if practicing clinicians should themselves self-quarantine to keep their loved ones safe. These practitioners also worry about

those fragile patients in their practice that were now being told to stay home and only call the clinics for a telemedicine visit. How would cancer patients fare after their staging surgery for treatment had been delayed. How would those patients with behavioral health diagnoses deal with the pandemic and social isolation.

With the reports that came in from all across the country, I put the information into a blog that the students could follow a few times a week. When the students started following the blog, the response was refreshing. They were tired of seeing all of the misinformation online and just wanted some perspective that wasn't influenced by outside factors. They also wanted to hear from clinicians, those individuals that hold their future careers, and understand what those clinicians were experiencing on a day to day basis.

I had over 30 prior graduates write COVID stories for the blog. They were rural and urban, and also from a variety of different disciplines. They were from warm climates and cold. And they were from new PAs and those that were well seasoned.

For the students it helped provide some perspective to the numerous unknowns that they were currently experiencing. With talk of furloughs and layoffs, what did the job market look like for a clinical year student preparing to graduate? Would the students beginning their clinical year even be allowed to see patients in an actual clinical rotation?

Students at our program are surveyed to death, but I did reach out for some responses on the blog to see if it was helpful for our didactic and clinical year students.

Student responses were as follows:

“Not feeling so alone in all of this after reading the stories.”

“A nice change of pace from other outlets of information...felt much more personal.”

“Helped me to feel connected to the program and is great to hear stories from multiple practice locations and disciplines.”

“Helps solidify that everyone is going through the same thing.”

We also asked students to tell us what they were struggling with most at that time:

“The thought of getting sick and getting my family sick.”

“Social isolation.”

“Uncertainty of graduating and maybe being in the workforce and what it might look like.”

“Finding a job after graduation. I feel very discouraged.”

“Personally, I am struggling with the possibility of having a delayed graduation.”

“I worked hard to get into school and it took me longer to get accepted than I had hoped. So, to get here and have it not be the experience I imagined is difficult.”

Another wonderful thing that came from this blog is an amazing feeling to know that all of these competent and caring practitioners graduated from a program that we put our heart and soul into each and every day, despite the budget cutback, COVID furloughs, or whatever else is thrown our way.

“A Newsletter” by Cassandra Sundaram

Weekday Forecast

- Monday: Partly cloudy. Chance of rain: 30%. 87°/70°. PBS (Predicted Bunny Sightings): 4
- Tuesday: Cloudy. Wi-fi connection going to be **big** problem today. Chance of rain: 90%. 88°/65°. PBS: 2
- Wednesday: Sunny. Chance of rain: 30%. 95°/88°. Difficult choice to make today between going outside and risking heat stroke or staying inside and risk losing sanity amidst loved ones in enclosed space. PBS: 1.
- Thursday: Overcast. Windy. Chance of rain: Probably?! 70°/58°. Some “funny” people may begin “joke” Christmas countdown today. PBS: 3 (and they are all tiny and all chasing each other in a circle)
- Friday: Mostly Sunny. Chance of rain: 5%. 84°/73°. PBS: 3, starring relaxed, older bunny soaking up those rays like an aging art thief lounging in the nude on the beaches of the French Riviera.

SIGHTS & SOUNDS

Notice: Smoke Alarm To Remain In Effect Indefinitely

Intermittent smoke alarms will continue to remain in effect in the immediate area of the [REDACTED] apartment complex weekdays between the hours of 5:30-8pm, until such time as we can all collectively get more of a handle on our home-cooking abilities. Be advised, YouTube and Calling Your Mom may be helpful resources, and following the steps of the recipe in order rather than just throwing everything in the pan and seeing what sticks might also prove advantageous. Most importantly, remember to wear a mask when retrieving curbside take-out.

Triathletes Popping up All Over Town

A record number of triathletes-slash-professional cyclists have been observed zooming past leisurely bikers and pedestrians on several nearby trails in the past few months, shattering countless fitness motivations and making lay people with the wholesome desire to “get out there and just enjoy the weather” look like slackers. The public is advised to practice extra caution around cyclists outfitted with skin suits and aero bars attached to handlebars—these speedracers are chasing their PRs and stop for nothing. Those with a heart condition may want to have a rear view mirror on hand and bring ear protection with them, as the speed with which these almost-sponsored cyclists whiz down the road combined with the unabashed yelling out of “On your left!” can be a predictor for miniature cardiac arrests. Despite your risk of coming into close contact with these athletes being relatively low, due to an almost certain inability for you to keep pace, it is still recommended to wear a mask on the trail. Face coverings can serve as additional protection against the inhalation of dust that these fitness enthusiasts are known for kicking up as they whoosh past, usually leaving behind only a lonely tumbleweed stumbling across the trail as a vague suggestion they were ever there.

LITERATURE

Passive-Aggressive E-mail Directed at Owners of Pooping Dog

A couple in their twenties was the victim last week of a passive aggressive email sent by a distressed apartment manager to tenants, reminding residents to refrain from allowing dogs on the public courtyard area. The e-mail was presumably sent after the couple was observed by multiple witnesses taking their two very-cute-but-barky dogs on multiple occasions to poop directly in front of the shared grill for all to see and smell. As of Saturday, potentially-counterfeit pesticide warning flags have been positioned in and around the grass of the communal courtyard, likely to deter copycats—or in this case, copydogs.

SCIENCE

New Study Reports Cochlear Damage during Stay-At-Home

A new study conducted by an independent researcher has found an appalling increase in the number of local adults experiencing cochlear damage since mid-March. Study findings suggest that one significant factor associated with the damage is the truly unbelievable decibels with which loved ones talk on the phone, online meetings, or just carryover during normal conversation due to having just exercised their vocal chords so ungodly loudly on said phone or online meeting. Other adverse effects reported by respondents included headaches, irritability, and intense questioning of ideological differences between partner and self. Companies and individuals planning to continue remote work may want to invest in really, super nice pair of noise-cancelling headphones. In one pilot study, the use of these headphones was significantly correlated with a lower number of domestic disputes ($r = -0.89, p < .05$).

SPORTS

Apartment Neighbors Act as Referees During Heated Bocce Ball Match

A couple sitting on their balcony last weekend were unexpectedly called upon to act as referees during an incident that happened with another couple playing bocce ball on the courtyard below them. According to one person involved with the incident, the red bocce ball was definitely three inches closer to the pallino than the yellow ball, maybe even more than that, but one of the players apparently has some concerning eyesight problems that prevented him from observing this fact clearly. The balcony couple who acted as referees sided with the woman who threw the red ball. “We had seen [the bocce couple] around the apartment building before, but hadn’t had a chance to say hello,” the couple said. “I don’t know if that guy will say ‘Hi’ to us in the hallway now, but at least we know we’ve got one fan,” the couple added, referencing the red bocce-ball thrower. When asked whether they would be willing to step in again as referees, the couple said they would do so if asked, but noted that their experience is limited to games like bocce ball, horseshoes and croquet and they more or less made it clear they want nothing to do with officiating Spikeball matches.

ON THE WEB

Woman States She Will Scream If She Is Asked To Make One More Online Account Or Download One More App To Play Online Games Or Meet Virtually With Friends

“Please, God, no more,” a local woman pleaded last Tuesday as she threw her phone on the couch, which had just alerted her of yet another invitation to a virtual hangout on a new platform. The virtually fatigued woman admitted she had run out of variations of the AIM screenname and password she had as a pre-teen, which she uses as a base for creating new accounts on the myriad apps and websites she’s being asked by friends and family to connect to. “At this point, I just don’t even have the imagination for it. How many different ways can you riff on PurpleyPrince\$\$3000?” The woman claimed she had been invited earlier Tuesday morning to a “virtual cactus throwing party,” which she declined to describe, shaking her head sadly. Reporters at this publication reached out to the person hosting the virtual party for clarification, but they could not be reached for comment (though to be fair, we sent a WebEx invite and in retrospect this alleged cactus thrower seems more like a Zoom person).

FOOD

Concern for Stranger’s Dinner Grows as Area Man’s Grilling Capabilities Called into Question

Two witnesses expressed strong concern for an unseen diner yesterday as they observed a man who they recognized as their neighbor throwing raw meat onto the community grill before turning it on. The man was seen turning all of the dials on the grill all the way up to cook what appeared to be two small, two-ounce beef medallions. The witnesses said on condition of anonymity that the grilling man then walked away for more than 30 minutes without returning to tend to the cooking meat. “We really feel for whoever is going to be consuming that,” one witness said. After watching from a distance for over 40 minutes without seeing the man return, the two people who observed the incident left the scene, distraught. Said one of the witnesses: “I don’t know for sure what happened to those beef chunks, but I just hope they had some back-up DiGiorno or something in the freezer.”

Update to this story: One of the witnesses reached out to this publication after their initial report to add that they saw what looked to be two small, beef-shaped pieces of coal in a grill-adjacent trash can later that evening.

TRAVEL

Trendy New Spots (Up & Coming!)

That grassy spot over the bridge and down to the left about a block.

Review: If you are a tiny bunny and enjoy eating all kinds of grass and flower stems and things, this is going to be your new favorite spot to grab some grub.

That park that is about a quarter mile north of here.

Review: There are a bunch of geese who live here. (Also, you will be able to see that they poop here too).

That building one block to the left, three blocks to the right.

Review: Watch out! Very life-like Siamese cat statue in window.

That gnarled tree in the grassy area out front.

Review: This tree looks like it is a front for the Ministry of Magic from the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Pull the knob on the sidewalk-facing part of the trunk at your own risk.

OPINION

Letter To The Editor: Will Whoever is playing “La Vida Loca” On Repeat Please Give It A Rest?

Listen, I’m as much a fan of Ricky Martin as the next guy, but I think I speak for everyone involved when I say that the units on all sides of Apt. 246 would greatly appreciate the occasional switch up now and then, especially for the morning alarm.

Sincerely,

Already Kinda “Living La Vida Loca” Anyway And Don’t Need Musical Reminder, Thanks

Opinion: Hey, Doesn’t The Capitol Look like One of Those Old-Timey English Police Helmets?

Take a looksy! Kinda does, doesn’t it? Huh!

Editorial Board: Sunset Looking More Radiant Than Ever

Wowee! Boy does that sun age well. 4.6 billion years never looked so good on anyone, in the opinion of the members of this Board. Especially this time of day too, when it gets kinda squat and orangey-red when it’s coming on down to spread its last little happy rays all over town. Geez! This star really knows how to bring down the house on a summer night. This editorial board would like to make clear that the sun this time of evening makes us feel like soccer practice when we were twelve and jumping in a pool afterward and feeling sick after that because we ate too many snickers ice cream bars; that’s what it is—this sunset, in our view, is a delicious snack that’s so good we want to consume it until we get a tummyache and more. This celestial marvel hits us with that kind of unique tired feeling after we’ve been reading a little too long at the beach and we can only see black and white and gray and there’s that sandy-smooth feeling of salt water drying on our baking skin. This terrifying colossal ball of golden gas when it’s melting down to this Board this time of evening makes us want to just tag it and say “Freeze!” And actually, we recall we have been successful at doing that at least once, because we still remember what song was playing at the pool that day with the ice cream bars (it was Temperature by Sean Paul and it is still one of our favorite songs). And we remember when this amazing giant sky furnace was getting low that day how hopeful we were that our mom would let us have a sleepover. Yes, boy oh boy, this incredible roasting, baking, boiling thing really

does take the cake tonight. This strange, blinding orb we actually can't ever really have our eyeballs turned at—this burning ball of fire that is both good and bad for us has certainly never looked better than today. Spreading its entire warm, golden yellow exhale right around us all at once, this Editorial Board thinks that it's just too bad that today was the kind of day that we can't inhale deeply enough. We suck up all that honey-colored sun breath all around us but eventually our lungs get all filled up and we can't store all that gorgeous gilded air for later like birds can. The inflated feeling of our hot, yellow-air-lungs make us wish we could teleport our Mom here—our Mom who probably in some part due to this crazy star thing granted us a sleepover on that Temperature by Sean Paul day—and just turn to her quietly, our lungs full of gold, and say “hey Mom, isn't this just the prettiest sunset you have ever seen?”

Ode to a Clump

Maureen Goss

There are a great many things that inspire wonder in this world, and it is really quite lucky that I can now add ‘clump of matted hair’ to my personal list. Where did it come from? Who did it come from? And, perhaps more importantly, when will it make its final descent into an appropriate trash receptacle?

Some say it began its journey in the third floor corridor, silently biding its time out of the way of unsuspecting foot traffic. I first noticed it, floating as an ethereal waif of darkness, on the second-to-last step of the staircase leading to the third floor. I jumped visibly, having encountered a few unsavory friends since the vacating of Alumni Hall (read: glistening cockroaches). When I realized it was inanimate, a wave of relief washed over me, followed by a wave of repugnance, and finally, grudging acceptance.

The pandemic has of course taken from us—various freedoms, human connection, lives, hugs, moisturized hands—but it has also given: a paned perspective, the opportunity to notice, to acknowledge, and in the right circumstances, to accept. I have accepted the presence of this hair clump in my daily routine, and my eyes now travel instantly to it as I approach the third floor landing. It is yet another mark of the prolonged emptiness of Alumni Hall without our colleagues, an indoor tumbleweed content with its place in the stairwell.

In the months since our acquaintance, I have imagined the possible means for its limp existence. A frustrated doctor tugging at his beard; someone desperate for a haircut no longer willing to wait; an unfinished replacement toupee for a world leader in search of a fresh vampiric look; a vacationing wild boar with alopecia. All seem equally likely, or at least possible, as possibilities of late have been expanded to include the third cousin twice-removed of utterly improbable. Our lives have been altered unimaginably due to a disease that did not have a name a year ago, and this clump of hair has borne witness to it all.

Accepting a mass of forlorn follicles into your life is one thing, but maintaining physical distance from your family, your friends, and the life you once knew is another. The see-sawing internal debate between the innate desire for human connection and the moral imperative of public health guidance rages on inside me, and working amongst the most knowledgeable and informed public health professionals somehow does not ease the tension. Our understanding of this virus changes daily, and with it, our expectations and hopes for the future, or even the weekend.

Someone recently told me that if we can find appreciation for small mysteries in life, we will never be disappointed. This year is, in short, an infectious enigma wrapped in a mystery shrouded in a horribly hairy existence, and maybe all we can do is our best to accept the last shuddering gasps of 2020, and embrace the familiar chill of a new season.

The City of Bezos

Fiction | Cristalyne Bell

When Juanita and Raymond exited the sleeper train with their two grandchildren, they were greeted by a “Welcome to Bezos” sign.

“Kids, did you know that this city use to be called Seattle?” Raymond said.

They shrugged.

“A lot of it is underwater because it took a while to divest from fossil fuels after the war.”

No response.

“Teenagers,” he whispered to his wife. They shared a knowing smile.

There was just enough time to check into the government hotel before heading to the pit. Raymond showed his retirement ID card to the clerk at the front desk.

“Can you believe people used to pay for hotels?” said Raymond.

“You still have to pay for the good ones,” the oldest one said.

“What’s wrong with this hotel? It’s clean and has a nice breakfast. What more could you possibly want?”

Juanita cut her husband a look and thanked the clerk for the room keys. They unpacked their suitcases and stuffed what they needed into a daypack.

“Kids, don’t forget your passports,” Raymond said. “Excited for your first stamps?”

Shrugs, and maybe some rolled eyes.

“Oh, Raymond, you know passports are going out of style. Kids these days aren’t interested in collecting tourist stamps. And that’s ok, we’re just glad you are here.”

The youngest one smiled.

“My teacher thinks it’s inhumane,” said the oldest one.

“Inhumane! What does your teacher know about inhumane? Inhumane was billionaires profiting from the skin off our backs.”

“Raymond,” Juanita said. “We don’t want to be late for the next tour.”

They walked a few blocks, careful to watch both ways for bicycles, and boarded the trolley. Juanita admired the architecture and green spaces through the window on their way to the city center. She had been in city planning before retirement, and she sort of missed it.

Some of her coworkers used to reminisce about the beauty of old architecture and the freedom to drive your own car whenever, and practically wherever, you wanted, but Juanita loved the modern, efficient and purposeful buildings and never much cared for driving, so she didn’t miss the highways when they were converted into railways.

“Look, kids, a vertical farm,” Raymond said.

The kids responded with interested and approving sounds, if not actual words.

Raymond beamed.

They had vertical farms back home, but nothing quite so large. They could just make out the robots zipping up and down like elevators, bringing in the harvest.

At the ticket counter for the pit, Juanita showed her retirement ID.

“Thank you for your labor,” the attendant said before handing her the tickets.

“And thank you for yours. You should be nearing retirement yourself. What have they lowered it to now, 40?”

The attendant laughed.

“Not quite. I volunteered to stay on with city sanitation until 55 when they changed the age to 52 last year, so I’ve got another year,” the attendant said. “Honestly, I don’t know what I’m going to do with another four hours in my day. Probably just pick up extra volunteer shifts here, organizing pit tours.”

“Did that teacher of yours tell you how people used to work 40 or more hours a

week until they were nearly 70,” Raymond said.

“Some people like working, and hard work led to innovation and discoveries.”

“Jobs were a little different back then for most of us,” offered the attendant.

Before Raymond could respond, the tour guide yelled to the crowd to gather around. The guide welcomed everyone and asked if it was anyone’s first visit. A scattering of small hands shot up. Raymond nodded to the kids. The little one looked to the big one, hands in pockets.

The guide explained that the city of Bezos was named after Jeff Bezos and asked if anyone knew who that was.

“A rich business owner in the early 2000s,” someone said.

“An evil king,” a small voice added.

The guide smiled and nodded.

That’s right. He was the richest person in the world, and he lorded over people. He got rich because he took advantage of workers, like other rich people did before the war. There was a company that he thought was his, called Amazon, and it was very successful, but instead of dividing the money between the workers like we do now, he took most of it. He knew that someday people might try to take his money, but he never thought it would be the workers because that was just the way of things. He figured the government would try to raise taxes or break up the company because it was too big, so he started secretly recording people through something called Alexa and using that information to make sure only his friends won elections. That worked for a long time, but then the Great Pandemic happened. It was a very challenging time and there was a lot of desperation that had been building over hundreds of years. Bezos could have helped a lot of people, but all he cared about was making more money. He was only generous when it made him look

good and he could get something out of it. While millions of people were losing their jobs and getting kicked out of their homes, his wealth doubled and doubled again. He just kept taking and taking, until people fought back. There was a long and terrible war, and a lot of people died. No one expected the rebels to win, not even the rebels themselves. When they finally did win, they took all the money from the billionaires and used it for schools, medicine, food, and housing. But the billionaires didn’t just hand over the money, and some of them had to go to prison. What’s prison? That’s a story for another time. Anyway, where was I? Oh yes, some billionaires, like Bezos, were put in pits in the middle of cities. The pits were different than the one you are about to see and sometimes not very nice people would try to throw things or spit on him. Back then, they were just holes in the ground that turned into a mud pit when it rained. Now, it’s more like a little apartment with a glass ceiling. After Bezos died—of natural causes of course—some people wanted to replace him with other former billionaires, or their kids, or corrupt politicians who sided with the billionaires during the war. Other people felt they had paid for their crimes and it was time to move on. No one wanted to get rid of the pits, though, because by that time, every major city had one and they were very popular. The pits evolved from a punishment into a great way to teach history and remind us of how far we have come. Eventually, people agreed that after the billionaires died, they would be replaced by actors, and capital cities would be renamed after them as a show of gratitude to their families for giving up their wealth—even if unwillingly—to build a better world. You are welcome to go in now. The show starts soon. Feel free to walk over the glass; it won’t break, and remember Jeff can hear you. Don’t forget to get your passports stamped with Bezos on your way out!

I've Learned by Shelby Hagen

When I was in preschool, I learned how to tie my shoe
I put my sneaker on my Dad's leg and he patiently showed me how to tie the loops together
My young eyes getting lost in the loops of the laces, the motion of his fingers tying the knot
"The bunny goes under the tree," he explained
And I thought I would never get it
That I would never understand how the bunny went under the tree to attach two shoes to
my two small feet
And I'd wear Velcro shoes forever
But eventually, I learned

At six years old I learned how to ride a bike
To really ride, without the assistance of the training wheels that would stop me from
tumbling into the sidewalk
My stomach twisted as I watched my parents use the screw driver and yank off those little
wheels, my only sense of safety
I fell a few times, flying down the hill in front of my home
There's a little scar on my right hand just under my third knuckle, evidence of my failure to
maintain upright
I thought I'd never ride a bike with my own future family as the sunset turned into night
But eventually, I learned

In school I learned quite a lot of things, but they were mostly things that I cannot remember
to this day
How to find the area of a triangle, to identify the structure of a cell, what a gerund phrase
was
I thought my grades were everything
My future, on the line
I thought that I'd never do anything very useful in this world
But eventually, I learned

When I graduated from college, bright-eyed and filled with enthusiasm
For the working world
As I felt I worked hard and had something to offer
I learned how to operate a copy machine
The first few came out lopsided, and I felt that if I was too stupid to operate a copying
machine then
How would I ever be respected?
But eventually, I learned

I had enough money to get by, my first job
I paid my rent on time and bought groceries, spending my nights clipping digital coupons
and cooking simple, nourishing meals
I drove an old car and bought used clothes and dreamed of expensive vacations to all of the
destinations
Places I would like to be

I thought money would bring me happiness,
But eventually, I learned

I have learned a lot of things
Collecting as much wisdom, knowledge, and advice as I can at twenty three
But the most important things I have learned have not been learned
In a classroom
At a job
Lost in a dangerous game of comparison to others

I've learned that a hunger for materials and physical items is a hunger never satisfied
And that
No amount of anything extrinsic, money, cars, clothes, will ever be enough

I've learned that
My parents know a lot more than I ever gave them credit for
And with their shortcomings they always did their best
I used to want them to leave me alone but now I find peace
In a cup of morning tea with my dad
Or an afternoon with my mom

I've learned that
Life will deliver more happiness
When you show gratitude for what you already have

I've learned that
Friendships are not built upon the foundation of photographs taken or shared expensive
meals or the novelty of
Concerts
Parties
Blurry nights out
But rather on the foundation of good conversation and laughter
And accepting each other for who you really are

I've learned that
Who I am, is plenty enough
That I have love to give
To myself and others

I've learned to be at peace with where I am now instead of looking into the future in hope
that happiness lies in the days ahead

Because instead

I've learned that
Happiness is an everyday choice

And it is my choice

Today, and every day from now on

POA

Markus Eckstein

Her skin is paper thin. Her knuckles are a mountain range beneath my thumb. I stroke the knobby peaks, hoping to instill some semblance of comfort.

“Good morning,” I say. “How are you feeling?”

Her eyes are as blank as a porcelain doll’s. They don’t see me, they see *through* me. No recognition flickers in her face. There’s an ocean between us.

An IV sticks out of her arm. I think: *antecubital fossa, twenty gauge, saline locked*. But that’s not my job today. I’m just a visitor, here to see a patient resembling a woman I call Gram.

The IV will be coming out this afternoon. I signed the paper moments ago. The treatments will stop. She will be moved to a different building. Then it’s only a matter of time.

Comfort care, they call it. Comfort care, *I* call it. *Morphine, one milligram per hour as needed for pain. Zofran for nausea. Maybe some lorazepam to quell the anxiety. Atropine. Gabapentin. Docusate*. Today, these aren’t my orders to write.

“You should be the one,” my brother had said at the family meeting. “You’re more familiar with this stuff than we are. You’ll make the right decisions.”

At the time, I agreed. In this moment, I wish I had nominated someone else. Familiarity makes the task no easier.

This is how I remember her: *Curlers in her hair. Ice cream on Sundays after church (and sometimes just because). Strawberry for me, hazelnut for her. Coffee and toast on the balcony. A crossword she lets me help with.*

Summer. I’m in a cherry tree, her arm around my waist so I don’t fall. The fruit is as big

as my fist. I nibble the flesh and deposit the pits in her cupped hand.

And now: A river of drool streams from the corner of her mouth. Her dentures are out, giving her lips an odd sucked-in appearance. Her hair is a tangle of wires. Her gown is speckled with whatever the hospital served and called breakfast.

“What,” she says. A statement, not a question.

“I just said, ‘Good morning.’ It’s me, Gram.”

She blinks once, twice, three times. She looks away, her eyes glazed with galaxies only she can see.

“Gram?”

Her gaze returns to me. Her eyebrows flick upward, like she’s surprised to see me. I’m a mirage to her.

“What,” she says again.

Something trembles in my chest. I force a smile. “Good morning.”

I rub her knuckles, give her hand a gentle squeeze. Her fingers are thin and cold as stone. I’m holding a bouquet of bones.

More memories, unbidden: *The smell of fresh bread wafting from the kitchen. Two days later we’re feeding ducks in the park. Walking home, the bread bag is filled with dandelions.*

Did these things ever even happen?

That summer when I was six, and the luggage with my clothes was lost on the plane. Each morning for a week, while the airline hunted for our suitcase, she brought me one of my grandpa’s shirts. I wore it like a dress. I wore it with pride like mountains.

I suppose she will be with him again soon. She’s always believed in that kind of thing. Most days I do, too.

“What.”

I have nothing to say. There *is* nothing to say. Nothing that can span this distance.

“What. What. What.”

“I love you,” I say, although I’m aware she does not comprehend. This woman does not know that I love her. She does not know what she means to me.

She does not know, but she *knew*. She knew, and that matters. And right now, that’s enough.

THE END

The Lady in the Sunhat by Shelby Hagen

There once was a street named Elated Lane. On Elated Lane, the sidewalks were crumbling, with little green weeds pushing their way through the cracks. On the right side of Elated Lane sat six little cottages, all the very same except for their color. One was painted blue, one was yellow, one was pink, one was green, one was purple, and the very last cottage was orange. In the orange cottage lived a very special person, the Lady in the Sunhat.

Each morning, the Lady in the Sunhat wheeled her unicycle onto Elated Lane, right onto the crumbling sidewalk. None of her neighbors knew her name, they just knew that she wore a big sunhat and round sunglasses each day. Keeping her balance, she rode her unicycle down Elated Lane, over the bumps and cracks and divets in the road. The peculiar thing was that the Lady in the Sunhat always smiled as she rode her unicycle up and down Elated Lane, her sunhat flapping in the wind. It did not matter if it was rain or shine, the Lady in the Sunhat always rode her unicycle and she always smiled. She waved happily to her neighbors in the other colored cottages as they peered out at her from between their blinds.

In the blue cottage lived Dr. Sick, who gave everyone in town medicine when they did not feel well. In the yellow cottage was Ms. Heritance, whose father left her piles and piles and piles of gold and cash when he died. In the other cottages lived other neighbors, other very successful people who had great jobs and everything they could ever need in life. Dr. Sick, Mrs. Heritance, and the other neighbors watched each day as the Lady in the Sunhat uncycled down the road, smiling. They watched as she returned, one hour later, with a plastic bag in her arms. Every day, it was the same bag!

One day, the neighbors in the blue, yellow, pink, green, and purple cottages met together in the middle of Elated Avenue. They were all confused, all angry.

“Why is the Lady in the Sunhat always smiling?” Dr. Sick exclaimed.

“There must be something in that bag of hers,” Ms. Heritance huffed.

So, that morning, all of the neighbors of Elated Avenue marched down to the orange cottage to wait for the Lady in the Sunhat to return home that morning. They waited, waited, waited, and waited, their angry boiling and building. Finally, she returned, balancing carefully as she rode her unicycle down the bumps in the street, carrying her same old plastic bag. She grinned, delighted to see her neighbors waiting for her in her driveway.

When she hopped off her unicycle, she was surprised when Ms. Heritance walked right up to her and yanked her plastic bag right from her hands. The other neighbors closed in, starting to pepper her with questions.

“Why are you so happy?” demanded Dr. Sick. The other neighbors nodded and yelled in agreement. “I have the best job in town, and I make the most money! I don’t smile nearly as much as you.”

Ms. Heritance piped in, "I have the most cash and gold coins in town, and I don't even smile as much as she!" The other neighbors yelled out all of the things they had, fancy sports cars, new gadgets, expensive vacations and new jobs. They were mad, seething! How dare this little lady on a unicycle be happier than them? They earned their happiness!

The lady cleared her throat, ready to speak over the racket of angry neighbors. "Ms. Heritance," she said, "would you care to show everyone what is in my bag?"

Mrs. Heritance ripped the plastic bag open, hungry for answers. She was disappointed to find that there was only a solitary banana in the bag.

"A fresh banana from the store," the Lady in the Sunhat explained, "to go with my lunch."

The neighbors were roaring once again. That didn't answer any of their questions! A banana certainly was not the secret as to why the Lady in the Sunhat was so happy.

The lady cleared her throat once again. "Excuse me," she said, her voice very weak. But the neighbors were not listening to her, they kept talking, yelling, raging!

The Lady in the Sunhat knew what she had to do to explain herself. Reaching up, she slowly removed her sunhat and held it in her hands, bowing her head. Finally, the neighbors fell quiet.

"Why," Ms. Heritance whispered, in awe. "She does not have any hair!"

"I am very ill," the Lady in the Sunhat explained. When she removed the sunglasses, Dr. Sick recognized the Lady in the Sunhat as one of his patients at his clinic down the street, a sweet, wonderful woman named Cherry.

"Cherry?" Dr. Sick asked, and Cherry nodded in response to confirm her identity. Cherry was very ill. She had to go into town each day to get treatment for her sickness.

"You all ask why I am so happy," Cherry explained, placing the sunhat back on her head. "But it is very simple. Sure, I do not have much. I don't have fancy gadgets, I don't have a whole lot of money, I don't have the long, soft hair that I used to love. But I have a home, a unicycle. I have my life, I have a fresh banana every day from the store. I feel the sunshine on my face and the wind on my skin and know that every day is a wonderful day to be alive. So do not go looking for happiness in my plastic bag, do not go looking for it at the store. Do not seek more. You all have everything you already need."

Cherry put her sunglasses back on and reached for the plastic bag from Ms. Heritance, picking up her unicycle from the driveway. "I must be going now to make my lunch," Cherry said. "I hope you all have a wonderful day." She wheeled her unicycle into her garage and disappeared into the orange cottage, shutting the door behind her.

Without a word the neighbors filed home into their respective blue, yellow, pink, green, and purple cottages. Dr. Sick thought about his job. Ms. Heritance thought about her money. The others thought about their new gadgets and their expensive clothes. None of it brought on the dazzling smile that Cherry had each and every day.

They began to make changes, the neighbors on Elated Lane. They did not try to replace their electronic gadgets when the newest came out. They got rid of some of their fancy clothes and kept a few that made them feel comfortable and confident. Dr. Sick focused more on what he loved about his job, talking to patients and making them feel better. Ms. Heritance donated some of her gold coins to a charity that meant a lot to her. They smiled and waved at Cherry as she rode her unicycle up and down the rickety street. Some of the neighbors would line up on the street, waiting for Cherry with a basket of fresh fruit and vegetables from their garden, unable to wait to see her smile and bask in her gratitude.

It was only a few months later that the Lady in the Sunhat stopped riding her unicycle up and down the bumps on Elated Lane. There was no big floppy sun hat in the wind, no smile, no banana in a bag. There was a big moving truck, two boys moving the few items out of the orange cottage and into the truck, driving away. Two weeks later, a new family moved in, filling the home with Persian rugs and hand-crafted furniture, armfuls of designer clothes and boxes of jewelry and decoration.

The neighbors on Elated Lane still think fondly of the Lady in the Sunhat, years later. And each year, on the first day of springtime, when the sun peaks out behind the clouds for the first time and the snow begins to melt, they meet in the middle of Elated Lane. They roll out their bicycles and they ride into town over the bumps and cracks and divets in the road, and they return an hour later, a plastic bag swinging from the handle bars. They sit in Dr. Sick's driveway in silence, in peace, peeling and eating the banana as the sun shines on their faces. They sit in silence and they remember. They say thank you, they shout it at the sky and they hug one another. The happiness they were looking for was already around them, in their hearts and minds their entire lives, and because of the Lady in the Sunhat, they had found it.

Statistics are people too

“There is strength in numbers.”

This well-worn aphorism usually calls to mind images of armies, teams or other large groups of people undertaking a challenge, it reminds us as well that statistics allow us to count, to document, and to understand. Despite Mark Twain’s feelings on the subject (<http://www.twainquotes.com/Statistics.html>), the value of statistics is nearly undisputed in today’s world – we use and rely on them far more today than Twain could ever imagine. Indeed, the current COVID19 pandemic has proved to be a real-life, real-time education in statistics and epidemiology for both professionals and the general public. Only a few months ago, news story on “flattening the curve” (<https://www.livescience.com/coronavirus-flatten-the-curve.html>) would probably have been taken as reporting on local roadways, and there are now daily in the news on the latest COVID19 statistics.

These numbers are clearly important. They help those responsible for decisions to understand what is transpiring, and hopefully help guide wise decisions. They help those of us on the front line think about what may lie ahead and how to prepare at work and at home. They also can, still, obscure just a bit the underlying truth they represent.

It is startling to see the daily increase in world-wide case-counts of COVID19 (<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>). It becomes even more staggering to consider these numbers when one stops for just a moment, and considers what each one of those numbers represents.

As the global case count grows, we need to recall that each of those “cases” is an individual, a person with a unique story, with a lifetime’s worth of hopes, fears, uncertainties, and anticipations. More than that, none of those numbers really represents just an “individual”, each number represents someone’s son or daughter, husband or wife, or sibling – each number represents someone in a network of relationships and interdependency.

It goes beyond just the raw numbers. When preparing a lecture on COVID19 two weeks ago (one that is now hopelessly out of date!), I had to refresh myself on some basic epidemiology, including the significance of R_0 [“the average number of people who will catch a disease from one contagious person”] (<https://www.healthline.com/health/r-nought-reproduction-number>). As a doctor I find it useful to know that COVID19 is considerably more infectious (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/32134116>) than seasonal influenza (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25186370>), but as a father and a husband I am reminded that an R_0 of 2-3.5 means that if I contract COVID19, I will most likely sicken at least half of my family.

Flattened curves, while desirable epidemiologically, also tell us that our adherence or non-adherence to social distancing and all sorts of other nuisances can make the difference between being busy vs being overwhelmed for us and our colleagues, and the difference between life and death for some of our friends and family.

Statistics are useful, statistics can be descriptive and perhaps even predictive, but fundamentally we need to remember that behind each and every number we count (in medicine), lies a unique person with his or her own individual story.

Statistics are people, too.

William E Cayley Jr MD MDiv

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Covid and the new normal

“So how are you adjusting to the new normal?”

I heard some variation of this question countless times over the first days and weeks of the societal shutdown that was implemented in an effort to contain the spread of covid-19. As sports were suspended, schools closed, and businesses shuttered, we collectively mourned the loss of our old “normal” and contemplated something different.

At times, I was reminded of the world changing events portrayed in the recent Avengers film saga. In the final moments of the movie [Infinity War](#), the cosmic bad guy [Thanos](#) snaps his fingers and erases half of all life. The movie [Endgame](#) then opens with a portrayal of the “new normal,” where half of humanity is gone— streets and sports arenas are empty and forlorn survivors are left to mourn the past. In late March, I commented in my journal that the roads on my morning commute were “so empty it was as though Thanos really had snapped his fingers!”

Over the past month, the strangeness has just intensified. My clinic is nearly always quiet, shops are closed or are enforcing social distancing and infection control (I had to get my temperature taken to enter the hardware store yesterday!), infection and mortality rates feature heavily in the daily news, and the economic damage from our (entirely appropriate) preventive measures continues to pile up.

And yet, amid all of these changes, I don’t think we really thought of this as a new “normal.” Rather, I think most of us thought (or hoped?) that this societal upheaval was just a temporary “time out.” Surely, we’d take some drastic steps, we’d face some challenges and some genuine social stress and discomfort, but this “new” state of affairs would not last forever? Surely, we’d reach a point at which we could go back to “the way it was?”

I think it is beginning to sink in that this is not so. I wrote in my journal last week that, “we really are starting to look at a ‘new normal’ which will not be the rapid response to covid-19 as a new threat, but long term readjustments to managing it as an ongoing threat.”

A new “normal” is starting to emerge, but it is something clearly new. While it seems that death rates from covid-19 may be [plateauing](#) in the hardest hit areas of the US, there is so much of the population still potentially at risk that we must plan for likely future “waves” of infection. It may be that social distancing, limitations on large gatherings, and even restrictions on hospital visitation may be vital for the long term prevention of future covid-19 surges.

Daily work life has been drastically altered. Many are out of work, many are working from home, and our approach to travel and meetings for work has been radically reshaped. Will we resume our previous ways, or will remote meetings become the new standard?

Education has moved from taking place in schools and universities, to being almost entirely at home or online. While we accommodated this as a necessary adjustment this spring, it is now becoming more apparent that some (if not all) institutions need to plan for remote education for a

much longer duration. Will students return to school and university in the fall as they have in other years? Or will remote education be with us for the foreseeable future?

Retail business has been dramatically affected. Online shopping has boomed, but many local small businesses have either been forced to close, or have had to rapidly adapt to web based shopping and curbside pickup.

Not all of the changes we've encountered in recent months are bad. There are reports that global pollution is down, families are finding they have more time together, and some changes to retail practices may have simply expedited inevitable changes needed for flourishing in a 21st century economy.

It is nearly impossible to quantify comparisons between society changing upheavals. There are valid concerns that the economic devastation due to covid-19 may be [on par with the Great Depression](#), yet the scale of loss and change engendered by this crisis seems to pale in comparison to either of the world wars. Nevertheless, no matter how one tries to measure the impact of the covid-19 crisis, it seems clear that the "normal" at which we will sooner or later arrive, really will be something new.

The movie *Endgame* goes on to tell the thrilling story of how, through teamwork and sacrifice, the Avengers set things "right" and (more or less) restore life to the way it used to be. It is a happy ending, but the reality is that it is one fit only for the movies.

No one I am aware of has any infinity stones, nor a time travelling Delorean, or even a Tardis.

Our path to our new normal will not be straightforward, most likely will not be easy, and most certainly will involve a normal that really is a change from before—it really will be a "new" normal.

But, we can hope that the new normal will eventually also involve a happy ending.

William E Cayley Jr MD MDiv

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Your Diagnosis - An Open Letter to My Dad

Samantha Gervais-LeClaire, FMIG Student Leader

The day was dark and stormy when we found out about you, Dad. The rain fell so relentlessly that I couldn't see the sidewalks outside our windows. The lightning darted across the sky, and the thunder shook our house. Although, the weather was worrisome, I thought it would be a great day to watch a movie; what a nice reward for finishing my first year of medical school! Hours later, Mom gently interrupted the movie, asking me with a nervous smile to come and talk. Her hesitancy and her shaking voice were the first indications that something was wrong.

As I walked into the living room, I joined my little sister and brother, as well as my newlywed husband, to hear about your appointment. The anticipation of what was to come was eating away at me. My gut was in knots, my heart was beating out of my chest, and my mind was racing. "Please don't be cancer. Please be a something treatable. Please let him be okay."

My thoughts were finally interrupted, though, when you spoke. "They think I have Parkinson's." Tears trickled down your face, which was riddled with discomfort. You looked small on our couch as you reiterated what the doctors told you.

My mind began to wander again as a roar of emotions echoed through me.

Confusion: "But Dad, you're healthy... you always have been! Your mind is sharp as a tack. You have some muscle pain and your left-hand shakes, at times, but that's not so bad. How could *you* have Parkinson's?..."

Anger: "The medical center wouldn't let me come to your appointment because of the COVID-19 pandemic. I could have observed the doctor's tests, listened to their explanations, and asked my own questions about your disease... but I was forced to stay home. I couldn't even comfort you when you found out..."

Fear: "I know little to nothing about this condition; we haven't even touched on this topic in school yet! What is going to happen to you, Dad? Did you just say you'll have tremors? Your coordination will be altered? You might develop dementia? I'm scared, Dad.... Scared for you and our family..."

Without realizing it, I felt myself rising to my feet to give you a hug. Although we were both a little shaken, it was still a warm embrace. Such a simple gesture, but it put us both more at ease. In that instant, I felt a little *hope...* hope in what the future held, regardless of the trials we were sure to face.



It has been weeks since your diagnosis, Dad, and it has certainly changed your life already. You've had lots of appointments and started taking medication to help with your motor function. Your worry has turned into motivation; you've started specific exercises, diet plans, and memory games to slow the disease's progression. Fearing of dementia, your stories have been more frequent and in greater detail than before, something that I truly appreciate.

This diagnosis has surely changed you, Dad, but it has changed me, too. I have accepted the fact that I cannot know everything. I may not know how to cure your disease, but I know how I can be the best daughter and care-taker I can be. I've also been reminded how fleeting our lives are. I'll never take another moment with you (or any family member) for granted again, as each day is truly a gift. Finally, as an aspiring physician, your diagnosis inspires me. I know that I will meet and support people like you as a physician every day. Whether it be Parkinson's or cancer, heart disease or diabetes, every diagnosis deserves honesty, patience, and an overwhelming sense of empathy.



Much like a dark and stormy day, a Parkinson's diagnosis is uncertain and frightening. However, our family has seen the rays of sunlight, peaking through the clouds. There will certainly be challenging times ahead of us, Dad, but we will let these rays of lights, our slivers of *hope*, guide us into the future.