

MIND TO MIND

Creative writing that explores the abstract side of our profession and our lives

Stephen T. Harvey, M.D., Editor

Why We Write

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It seems an incredible exercise of ego for me to assume that some random thought I might choose to record would be of any interest to others, yet we (as a species) have, historically, an incredible predisposition to write things down. From early pictographs to virtual blogs, humans are driven to document their experiences. Is it a bid for immortality, defying our transient, miniscule presence in this world, or is it truly philanthropic, hoping that someone might benefit from our experiences, our stories, and our mistakes? Do we write for ourselves or for others?

For a few it is like a compulsion. I personally do not enjoy the process—it is painful to struggle with a keyboard, and the dictation option, as easy as it should be, is still not quite viable. Perhaps the presence of an expectant-looking microphone, along with the unbearable urge to edit on the fly, interrupts a smooth flow of thought. I have tried the “purge” approach, dumping words on a page, hoping to find some thread of continuity to link it all together, but it only rarely leads to coherent results. It is uncommon and unpredictable; but, a few special times, the words flow without thought or effort, seemingly originating outside my awareness or control.

Just as many don't read—not obsessively, anyway—even more don't write. Writing is hard; but, having written is wonderful—just to bask in the warm glow of authorship. But, the process itself is a wretched and humbling struggle. I sympathize with the pure academics and even journalists, who allegedly write for a living. There is precious little good writing even in the hallowed towers of erudition; and sadly, most in academic medicine can't put two coherent sentences together.

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Accepted for publication April 3, 2019.

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All I can come up with is that we who write do because we can't *not* write. We struggle to be understood, or at the very least to be heard. It may be that, like a formal confession, we need to articulate our frustrations in order to better cope. Who else can we speak to? Who might even begin to understand our lives in medicine, simultaneously miraculous and tragic? Even our closest family—those who share our innermost secrets—can never really see with our eyes. *We must* write to reach out, to share, and to feed the hope that we are not completely alone, that we can somehow connect with another kindred soul—a reader, perhaps a fellow writer—also searching for the simple blessings of human contact, empathy, and acceptance.