

My Season for Editing

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J Am Acad Psychiatry Law 46:413–15, 2018. DOI:10.29158/JAAPL.003807-18

For the past two decades, I have had the privilege of being the Editor of the *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (JAAPL)*. I will vacate that post at the end of December 2018. The work has been exciting and even exhilarating at times. I thank all those who have supported my leadership and have helped me build *JAAPL* into what I believe is an impressive means of communication. My appreciation extends to those on the masthead, the staff in the editorial office, the host of reviewers, individuals who accepted invitations to write, and those who served behind the scenes and provided me quiet counsel. I am pleased that in those years no one refused an invitation to join the editorial board. My requests for help and advice related to *JAAPL* have had positive replies from colleagues nationally and internationally. Occasionally, individuals were aggrieved by editorial decisions and made their disagreement clear. But in general, they noted that *JAAPL*'s leadership did not go missing during those trying times. We stood still, accepted criticism, and made serious efforts to resolve complaints.

Michael Norko, Deputy Editor of *JAAPL*, has arranged for several colleagues to bear witness in this issue (Volume 46, Number 4) to my written intellectual work. Those writers have worked with grace and artistry to shed light on my contributions to the literature in the field of forensic psychiatry. I say thanks to them all. They prepared a road-map of sorts, showing paths to my interests, while also crafting a loose collection of locations that might suggest something about who I am and what my major interests

have been. Whatever they have said or meant remains grist to be ground in our readers' mills.

I expect that many readers are unaware of the objectives I set for *JAAPL* when I applied to be Editor so many years ago. I reaffirmed those objectives at the half-way mark of my tenure. I wanted *JAAPL* to be a significant organ for disseminating scholarship about forensic psychiatry; to be a major reference work for forensic training programs; to be a catalyst for substantive debate about forensic controversies; and to be a mechanism for enhancing communication among disciplines working at the interface of psychiatry, psychology, neurology, neuroscience, social science, and the law. Such objectives were pursued and executed through diversification and expansion of the Editorial Board, revision and updating of the instructions to authors and the statement of authorship responsibility, revision of *JAAPL* esthetics, and expansion of its departments. A significant dimension of this work included steady outreach to the field to encourage the broad constituency of forensic mental health specialists to write for us.

I know better than to attempt an evaluation of how well the objectives have been accomplished. On the other hand, I take some pleasure in recognizing the expansion of submissions from Europe, Asia, and Australia, and from other disciplines besides psychiatry. I also know that many training programs have sought to participate in submitting to the Legal Digest section, and there has been increased interest in writing editorials. It is also easy to detect *JAAPL*'s participation in debates about, for example, the "Goldwater Rule," competency to stand trial, evaluation of risk, development of forensic psychiatry ethics, and the feminist and other minority perspectives on forensic practice.

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Disclosures of financial or other conflicts of interest: None.

I confess, too, that I have had additional personal thoughts about the functions of an academic journal. Our leadership at *JAAPL* have discussed endlessly subjects such as ethics in publishing, representation among editorial board members and reviewers, and civility in the writing of editorials. We have reviewed several times our policy about case reports and the judicious use of gendered pronouns. We wanted to do our work without impugning the dignity of any person or group, maintaining respect for all. Here again, we recognized how important and difficult it is to pursue excellence in the task of editing.

There are other special dimensions of editing a journal and thinking continually about its function. There were times when *JAAPL* came into mind just as I was falling asleep or waking up. Those were occasions when this apparently simple magazine seemed to take on the human quality of breathing and interacting with me, and I felt obligated to nourish it more attentively. I was reminded of this sensation recently as I read Zachary Woolfe's piece in the *New York Times*, entitled "Yo-Yo Ma Wants Bach to Save the World."¹ Woolfe was discussing Ma's recent release of his third recording of Bach's cello suites. Apparently, the first recording was issued in 1983 when Ma was around 27 years old. He issued the second recording around 1998, the time when I became Editor, and the third is out this year when he is a 62-year-old mature artist. Woolfe framed the interaction between Ma and his Stradivarius cello almost in human terms. There is labeling of the music at age 27 as being youthful and a bit know-it-all. On the other hand, the third recording is considered "relaxed, confident, deeply human" in interpretation, and different from the second recording, which Woolfe saw as "total confusion." There was something special about the way Ma and his cello matured together to produce music. Similarly, my journal and I matured together as we defined its personality and produced a literary organ with a particular bent.

In their coming together, there was also purpose and intent, or, as Woolfe put it, the possibility of "blending Bach and social responsibility" (Ref. 1, p AR1). For example, in the article, reference is made to Ma's connecting his music to community problems, to civic life. He brings his music to the fore as he plans a day of action and communicates with his audience. With his maturity, music critics see him as more settled and able to acknowledge difficulty, peacefulness, and beauty in what Bach composed.

Ma wants to make the world better, which is a soul-moving rationale for his persistent efforts to use his craft in "creating community" in entities such as his Silk Road Ensemble. Woolfe talks of Ma's capacity to chart "a remarkably complete anatomy of emotion and aspiration" (Ref. 1, p AR1).

The language of *JAAPL*'s bent, or purpose and intention, was highlighted when I recently visited an exposition of Charles White's art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. At the entrance to the Retrospective on White's work was the following: "An artist must bear a special responsibility. He must be accountable in the context of his work. And that work should reflect a deep, abiding concern for humanity." Elsewhere in my stroll around the exposition, I encountered the statement that White was unwavering in his commitment to creating "images of dignity." I smiled in recognition and affirmation. Both Yo-Yo Ma and Charles White saw a way of blending their work with this task of creating images of dignity. It has been a force in my ideas about *JAAPL* and an important theme in my recent book.² It accounts for my caution in dealing with problems presented by case reports, and my interest in interacting fairly and honestly with authors of all kinds.

My hope is that, like Ma and White, my journal editing has reflected this preoccupation with human dignity as much as my obvious interest in academic excellence. These interests must go together, as the mature editor I am now sees clearly that a journal can represent communication in print while also promoting justice, equality, and fairness in mundane operations and interactions. In the world of work, what some of us now call the workspace, there are many impediments to pursuing dignity. In this regard, academic journals are unique operations. They can be malleable enough to be molded into an instrument that stands firmly for dignity of person—what Jeannette Pols has called "humanitas" or the dignity of being human.³ But while we academics take pleasure in supporting humanitas, we like to play artfully with "dignity of merit," what Pols called "dignitas." The artful play here is that academics regularly state their commitment to equity of persons (humanitas). However, they enjoy the benefits that accompany dignity of merit, where "doctors" of all sorts benefit from the status that their professions enjoy. I acknowledge Pols' argument that merit may represent esthetic values that in daily life serve to organize people and establish social conventions. In this context,

journal people (authors, reviewers, editors) can be committed to humanitas and occasionally slip into strict adherence to a rigid form of dignitas that impedes the common journal discourse built on a commitment to equity and fairness.

In this moment of introspection, I suggest that editing is not just about the mechanics of improving authors' submissions or struggling to have a journal cited everywhere so that the citation index increases. It is, too, about doing one's best to assure that all those who encounter the publication take their leave feeling honored and enhanced.

I recognize that my season for editing has run its course. The name of Michael Norko will top the

masthead. He has my earnest wishes for a time of erudition and balanced decision-making. I hope his stay will be rooted in contentment and creativity. With my commentary now completed, I say goodbye in the characteristic way we say it in Barbados: "I gone."

References

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