End of an Era

This is the last editorial that I will write as your Editor of the Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services (JPN). Transition is underway, and you will be hearing about your new Editor, Mona Shattell, PhD, RN, FAAN.

Retiring as Editor is very much like ending any performance. Musicians know very well that the time to end a concert is when the audience is still enthusiastic and wanting to hear more. They know that it would be deadly to have an audience become bored, or wanting an ending soon. Thus, it is with my performance as Editor. Hopefully, readers have enjoyed my editorials, and seeing the fruits of my labors (i.e., articles) when I have worked with potential authors. If this were a concert, I would have appreciated applause.

Will there be an encore? I look forward to being invited to write guest editorials or manage special issues or other projects that Mona has in mind.

I thought I would anticipate your questions (Q), and my answers (A), if we were in a face-to-face dialogue.

Q: What stands out as the best part of being Editor?
A: Working with potential authors, who agreed that I could be their “best friend” rather than a ruthless critic, brought me the greatest satisfaction and joy. One of the earliest encounters with a potential author, who needed much help with writing, was when a former Los Angeles Police Department cop, turned RN, submitted a manuscript about the methadone clinic he had developed at Bellevue Hospital (McGonagle, 1994). His “cop self” predominated our early conversations, and he did not trust that I would stay in the background. Long story short, he invited me to Bellevue; I helped him create a publishable piece, and it was the lead article.

Q: Why step down now?
A: “Now” began more than 5 years ago. Administrative folks at Slack Incorporated (the publisher of JPN), along with me, interviewed nearly a dozen potential candidates. We used many methods to identify candidates, and created the set of criteria for a successful candidate. So, “now” is not recent.

Q: What is the funniest experience you had as Editor?
A: Probably receiving a 500-page manuscript titled, “The Psychological Life of an Amoeba.” Although it was clearly not manuscript material, it contained many sentences that produced laughs. The sad part is that the author was totally serious about his/her discovery.

Q: What is the most annoying or frustrating part of being an editor?
A: Using “most,” I would say dealing with potential authors who submit manuscripts because a faculty member suggested submission. Very often these papers are submitted with no effort to produce a manuscript, but are simply term papers. These unfortunate students do not seem to be aware that they should look at the track record of their faculty and see their publication record in refereed journals.

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Next on my list would be dealing with potential authors when they have received a “revise” decision, but then do not follow the suggestions offered to make the manuscript publishable.

Another bothersome dimension is individuals who write letters of inquiry. My usual response is that I
cannot say whether we would be interested in their manuscript because I do not know how well they write. I think faculty may also be to blame for this phenomenon.

Q: Have you had disagreements or arguments with the publishing administrative staff?
A: Of course!!

Q: Please describe one.
A: We used to have folks within the company pose for the covers of the journal. For one issue, when the lead article was about depression, one of the female staff was photographed wearing a red sweater. When I objected, I was told we were too close to the publishing deadline, and it would have to remain. I said I would resign, and no longer be Editor. The outcome was that the photograph was retaken with the woman wearing a brown sweater.

Q: Any others?
A: None that I am willing to make public.

Q: What will you do with all your newly found free time?
A: When people would ask Hildegard Peplau what she would do in retirement, her response was: “Only what I want to do, when I want to do it.” That sounds pretty good to me!

High on my list is traveling more, for pleasure, not linked to a meeting or presentation. My husband, Neil, and I had always planned to get to Hungary, his native country. We never got there, but I will, in 2017!

I plan to work on my long list of “wanna reads”; the books are stacked neatly in an approximate order of their priority.

I want to work on becoming a better musician. I do very well with choral singing and hand-bells, but want to improve my keyboard skills. Also, I will have time now for the small “within-choir” groups that I always wanted to participate in.

Q: What does your family think about your retiring as Editor?
A: They have a list of stories and short chapters that they want me to write. These are based on our 3,000-mile (New Jersey to California) summer trips, where I entertained them, for hours on end, by telling stories. Their favorite is: “The Witch with Turquoise Teeth.” My favorite is: “Why Children Get Lost and How to Find Them.” I also plan to include stories about scary things that they did, such as my son, Mark, climbing up two stories, outside an apartment building in Chicago, and surprising the folks on their balcony. Or my daughter, Lisa, getting away from us at an Amish farm, and climbing into a pig pen, where a huge sow was feeding her new babies.

Q: Has there been a formal transition or retirement party or celebration for you at JPN?
A: Yes, JPN held its annual editorial board meeting at the American Psychiatric Nurses Association (APNA) convention, in Hartford, Connecticut on October 20, 2016. During the meeting, Mona was introduced to the editorial board and review panel, and a transition celebration was included. There was a cake for those who visited the booth during exhibit hours. Aileen Wiegand, Executive Editor of JPN, read several of the “congratulations” notes sent by board members who could not be there. For instance, Martin Ward wrote, “Shirley taught me: (1) how to not sit quietly when something you disagree with is being said, irrespective of time, place or person; and (2) the joy of being active, all the time.”

Photographs (from top to bottom) of the congratulatory cake at the APNA convention, Mona and Shirley, Shirley with her parting gifts, and Shirley with Peter Slack.
Peter Slack, President of Slack Incorporated, and I did some reminiscing about the many changes that have taken place. For instance, in the beginning, the entire review process was on paper, with manuscripts and review documents sent via mail (mostly Fed-Ex® packages). JPN was the first Slack journal to “go digital.” I have photos of my empty file cabinet, when the online peer review system came into place.

Transition is underway, with Mona “shadowing” the manuscript review process during these months before she begins her role as Editor January 1, 2017.

Q: How did you become the Editor?
A: This is a delightful story, best told in a face-to-face format over coffee or wine. Along with some New Jersey psychiatric nurses, who were very annoyed with Charles Slack, the founder of Slack Incorporated, we protested his beginning an Academy of Psychiatric Nurses, based on the newly established American Academy of Nurses. The protest was in the form of circling his booth at the American Nurses Association 1978 convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, preventing people from gaining access to his display of books and journals. The outcome was that five of us agreed to become reviewers of their existing psychiatric nursing journal, and after several years, I agreed to become Editor. This agreement included a total renewal of the journal, including a name change and new editorial board.

Q: Will you continue to provide help for potential authors who approach you?
A: Yes, I will. I still plan to do workshops on writing for publication, and these include evaluating/editing drafts of manuscripts. I will also probably receive requests from potential authors as I meet them at conferences and in clinical settings.

Q: Is there anything that you would absolutely not or never do?
A: I learned long ago that it is unwise to say “never.” So, I never say never.

REFERENCE

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