

Embracing Broknness

By Sarah Blanton, PT, DPT, NCS, Editor-in-Chief

Wholeness does not mean perfection: It means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life.”

– Parker Palmer

Welcome to the second issue of the *Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation (JHR)*.

As the writer and educator Parker Palmer describes, recognizing the inevitability of brokenness is a critical part of our life’s journey. More specifically, rehabilitation could be viewed as an opportunity to partner with individuals who are confronted with illness and disability in their discovery of a new definition (sense) of wholeness; one that surrenders the pursuit of perfection and embraces the oft unwieldy journey of gathering the broken in order to unearth the present experience and discover not only what is whole but also of what that wholeness beholds. In order to share in this process, however, we clinicians have to practice with the underlying premise that a true sense of healing emerges only when we embrace that brokenness. It is with this reflection that we come to you with this second issue of *JHR*. Our intent is that the rich collection of

poetry, prose, visual and performing arts will provide a light into ourselves, recognizing that in our roles as clinicians and educators, patients and students, seeking wholeness means sharing our brokenness and our humanness together in common dialogue. Thus, through the lens of humanities we can gain a greater understanding of each other, our shared journeys and our shared humanity.

In our reflections on brokenness, we were struck with how the art of poetry writing is powerful in its use of rhythm and meter to convey depth within emotions and of how, as Marilyn McEntyre states, the “practice of poetry teaches clinicians to hear differently.” For this Summer issue and in *JHR* issues to follow, we are initiating a regular poetry series entitled: “Poets in Profile,” with the intention to introduce our readers to a range of established poets. Within this column, we will provide the biography of a poet whose work has explored aspects of disease or disability as it may relate to rehabilitation sciences and one of their select poems. A brief analysis of the poem will be provided to stimulate a deeper understanding of the potential meanings, symbolism and general craft of writing poetry.

Our inaugural poet is Poet Laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner Natasha Trethewey, who reflects that her own journey towards poetry began with memory – a desire to hold onto what was being lost. Taking us deeply into those feelings, her poem *Give and Take* describes her great-aunt Sugar's experience of Alzheimer's disease and how she was "losing her to *her* memory loss." Through her finely crafted words, we are given opportunity to recognize the power of poetry in keeping hold of the past while also allowing space to wrestle with present and future direction of life's journey.

Along with the Poets in Profile series, *JHR* will also provide regular space for budding clinician or patient poets who desire to share their own reflections on experiences of rehabilitation or disability, and we will continue to provide perspective pieces that serve to educate the reader on the relevance of art and literature within our practice. In this issue, we are fortunate to have the opportunity to feature both Dr. Jim Carey's poem, *Cadaver Anatomy – Absorbing Humanity* and Marilyn McEntyre's reflections in her article "Why a Poem in a Place Like This." Dr. McEntyre reminds us of how poetry differs from prose, and her article serves as an affirmation for those of us who attempt to dabble in poetry writing as a reflective practice within our clinical care. As just such an example of this reflective practice, Dr. Carey's words urge us to look beyond the scholarship and past the muscles and ligaments to the person and life that once lived within the body: "Past your science / Past our machinery / Seize our stories / Uphold our soul" so that, "In awe, we learn anatomy / Higher, we learn humanity."

In symbiotic response to Trethewey and Dr. Carey, we encountered the compelling dialogue and masterful writing of award-winning playwright

Margaret Edson. In her Pulitzer Prize masterpiece, *Wit*, she "constructs a story of repair and restoration of the individual not through treatment of the body ravaged by cancer, but by admitting one's weaknesses, exposing oneself, and, perhaps most frightening of all, relinquishing control and, in the process, becoming vulnerable." Within her interview, she communicates her passionate belief that by incorporating theatre and playwriting into rehabilitation education, students can grow as clinicians, learn to confront their own mistakes and gain a deeper understanding of their patients and themselves.

It is within this search for deeper awareness and insight, that Dr. John Banja offers an essay exploring the universal experience of how disability alters our perspective of life and of the meaning that we place on our lives. He utilizes the dialogue within both Edson's *Wit* and Jean Dominique Bauby's autobiographical narrative *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* to ask "[when] confronted with such an assault on one's identity, how do we re-imagine ourselves after disability strips our previous perceptions of who we are, and what gives our lives meaning?" His examples challenge our devotion to self-reliance with the inevitability of our interdependencies. Since both of these stories are in themselves powerful and compelling, we have provided their media reviews to supplement Dr. Banja's article.

Part of the journey to embrace brokenness includes embracing our histories. This journey is as important for the family as it is for the patient. As a masterful story-teller, Dr. Marshall Duke shares his compelling research with the Family Narratives project, in particular that "knowledge of family history [is] crucially important to well-being" and that both good

and bad family stories serve to build strength and resilience. Building upon the notion that there exist seven basic plots that provide structure across all fiction stories, he has found these same plots in his informal family stories. In particular, the voyage homeward as the narrative for rehabilitation is one that transforms experiences of illness and recovery, providing a healing narrative for the story teller and the listener, the voyager and the family. As clinicians, by reflecting back to our patients and their families the potential healing impact inherent in their story, not only may we forge a more effective therapeutic alliance with our patients, but we will be practicing true family-centered care.

In the documentary *Genius of Marian* by Banker White, we see a stirring and elegant portrayal of one family's story dealing with the repercussions of Alzheimer's disease. Only through story, can we be taken so intimately into simple acts of daily living and understand the impact of the disease on the family as a whole. In the interview with the director, he poignantly shares an often unspoken feeling among family caregivers – the difficulty of loving someone who has been changed by disease, the challenge to “not have [that love] look and feel like it used to.”

Dovetailing into the stories of Alzheimer's disease shared by Banker White and Natasha Trethewey, we gain a student perspective as Emilly Marshall reflects on lessons learned from the early weeks of her very first clinical rotation. Her narrative, "They Have a Story" reminds us with a sincere vulnerability and honesty to pause - and remember - that we all “have a story,” if we only listen.

Finally, in visual arts, Dr. Michael Borich's image of the structural architecture of brain fiber pathways is more than a compelling visual display of a diffusion tensor imaging technique. He uses data visualization to underscore the importance of understanding and appreciating visual design as we seek to adequately try to portray and convey complex analyses and multi-dimensional information.

We are excited to introduce our new editorial board members, Siobhan Conaty (Associate Professor of Art History in the Department of Fine Arts and Art History, La Salle University, Philadelphia) who will serve as our "Historical Perspectives of Art" Section Editor, Leigh Hale (Dean of the School of Physiotherapy / Centre for Health, Activity, and Rehabilitation Research at the University of Otago, New Zealand), who brings with her valuable international journal experience as Editor of *New Zealand Journal of Physiotherapy* and Natasha Trethewey as poetry consultant. We express our gratitude to Emory's Department of English for both financial support and the contributions from two talented English doctoral students (Stephanie Larson and Emily Leithauser), supporting the intention of *JHR* to be a rich teaching environment for interdisciplinary allied health humanities education.

If you are interested in submitting your work to *JHR*, please review our [Submission Guidelines](#) and [Frequently Asked Questions](#) sections. If you are considering being a reviewer, please contact Dr. Sarah Blanton: follow the [Contact](#) link, indicate the content area you are interested in reviewing and attach your CV.