

What Is Given May Be Gained

By Sarah R. Blanton, PT, DPT, Editor-in-Chief

Sabbaths 1999

We travelers, walking to the sun, can't see
Ahead, but looking back the very light
That blinded us shows us the way we came,
Along which blessings now appear, risen
As if from sightlessness to sight, and we,
By blessing brightly lit, keep going toward
That blessed light that yet to us is dark.

Wendell Berry, *Given*

I am contemplative this morning as I think back on a memorial service I recently attended for my friend and neighbor Ralph. Our paths crossed when he first volunteered for one of my stroke research trials. He struck me as a wise and thoughtful man in those early days, as he graciously donated his time to the study. We were evaluating the impact of family-focused intervention to support carepartners at home during

the rehabilitation process. As the years passed and I had the privilege to get to know Ralph better, I saw how his presence shaped so many individuals in a multitude of ways. His life truly was one of service. He



modeled kindness and compassion as he treated everyone he met with joy and respect.

As I was working to revise my study intervention this spring, Ralph and his wife graciously agreed to help me craft this new approach to rehabilitation. Welcoming us into their home, together we created educational videos of ways carepartners can work collaboratively with stroke survivors to make functionally-based activities therapeutic and motivating.

On that rainy afternoon, knowing he loved the poet Wendell Berry, I asked Ralph to recite his favorite poem. He chose “Sabbaths 1999.” While I filmed this joyful moment, my intent was to simply capture the unique exchange we had. It was so special. What I did not realize at the time was how those words would resurface to resonate so profoundly. When I heard of Ralph’s passing, I shared this video with his wife. It was not until I viewed the footage collectively with the rest of his community at his memorial service that I understood how important that simple gesture had proved to be.

It has been said that poetry always arises in public discourse when language fails us. Indeed, during our time of mourning, Ralph spoke to each of us through these powerful words—words captured during a simple encounter when a physical therapist and a patient chose a poem to learn more about each other. Until I heard his eulogy, I also did not know how much he had regarded his participation with the research and teaching in our physical therapy program as an expression of *service* following his stroke.

Ralph taught me so much. I asked his family’s permission to share his story in this editorial because I know it is his nature to keep teaching and sharing wisdom even after his passing. I learned from my dear friend that taking a moment in a clinical encounter to

read a poem can be transformative—for all parties involved.

The integration of the humanities in our classroom and clinical spaces can take on many forms, with unexpected encounters and surprising impact. As Ralph sought meaning in a poem, I found a renewed sense of meaning in my own work, as both a researcher and health humanities scholar. The skills of mindfulness, reflexivity, and intention—learned from studied time in the humanities—helped create a space where two individuals on a shared rehabilitation journey came to find a deeper meaning in the process. And isn’t that what true healing is all about? This shared meaning-making we do with each other, within ourselves and through each other.

What does your clinical day look like when you start with an intention of learning what knowledge you can gain from each patient’s life, their lived experience of illness, and, more broadly, their search for meaning? How do those questions shape your own life’s search for meaning? And, most importantly, how do they encourage healing? I’ve now learned first-hand how asking one thoughtful question can have an ongoing, exponential impact for good.

Thank you, Ralph, for so many powerful life lessons given. Perhaps the simplest one I gained, one that I’ll carry with me moving forward, is that life and clinical encounters are too short to *not* take a moment to pause, reflect—and maybe read a poem.

***Acknowledgements:** With deep gratitude to the family of Ralph McCluggage for allowing us to share this video and experience with JHR readers.*

Our Fall 2022 issue of *JHR* offers us opportunities to sit in that space of humanities for critical exploration and reflection. The articles, essays, and videos include:

"Ease in Motion: Rehabilitation Inspired by Science, Guided by Art"

By *Francesca Tuazon, PhD*

Clinicians may well agree that rehabilitative treatment is both a science and an art. Francesca Tuazon makes that concept concrete in this telling piece. She details her own path to healing inspired by her study of a specific chemical reaction and the works of artist Alexander Calder. This combination of seemingly disparate elements has led her to a fascinating new definition of rehabilitation—one she calls Ease in Motion. Just when is rehabilitation really “done”?

"Accommodating Students With Disabilities in Professional Rehabilitation Programs: An Institutional Ethnography Informed Study"

By *Saminder Dhillon, PhD (candidate); Sandra Moll, PhD; Magda Stroinska, PhD; and Patricia Solomon, PhD*

In this institutional ethnography informed study, researchers aim “to determine how the accommodation *work* of occupational therapy and physiotherapy educators is being organized by institutional expectations and practices and to critically reflect on how this impacts the accommodation process.” The authors identify a “false dichotomy” that places the needs of these students in opposition with some of the professional requirements of a practicing clinician—and suggest some solutions.

"Doing Healthcare Research Differently: SocioHealthLab's Special Video Series, Part 2"

Edited by Tim Barlott, PhD, MScRS, BScOT

The SocioHealthLab “is a research collective of health and social science researchers, practitioners and students from Australia and around the world, striving for healthcare transformation through applied, justice-oriented, theory-driven, creative and collaborative socio-cultural research.” In this final video installment, authors share their creative works that range from a “poetic meditation navigating” life with aphasia to “healthcare related to sex and intimacy in the disability space.”

"Implementing Expressive Writing in Outpatient Physical Therapy Clinics: Connecting Theoretical Foundations With Practical Strategies"

By *Eric T. Wanner, DPT; Jennifer Lynne Bird, PhD; and C. Jayne Brabler, PhD*

This extensively-researched article presents a compelling argument for encouraging physical therapy patients to put their thoughts and feelings into writing. The authors argue that while empathetic verbal exchanges are fundamental to the rehabilitation process, simply encouraging patients to write—by using short answer prompts or other methods suggested here—can produce deeper insights that help improve treatment and outcomes.

"Three Poems: Lost in Translation"

By *Marta Tymchenko, BS*

In this series of three striking, spare, and emotionally authentic poems, Marta Tymchenko provides thoughtful insights into three different perspectives on a clinical encounter. What is lost in translation when a loved one needs to interpret thoughts between the

patient and the doctor?

"Profiles in Professionalism with Bruce Greenfield"

By Bruce Greenfield, PT, MA, PhD, FNAP and Melissa McCune, PT, DPT, MPH

In this installment of the Profiles in Professionalism series, we interview Professor of Ethics at Emory University School of Medicine and one of the founding editors of the *Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation*, Bruce Greenfield, PT, PhD, FNAP. In this interview, Dr. Greenfield discusses the intimate connections between professionalism and ethics and how he works with students to better understand their own core values alongside the core values of the profession.

"Turn Your Cameras On"

By Noah Watson, SPT

Physical therapy students nationwide are grappling with an unprecedented change in the educational system: forced remote learning of a hands-on profession. In this amusing and thoughtful essay, Noah Watson describes how experiencing one course—and witnessing its caring instructor addressing students' frustrations—taught him the crucial importance of “empathy, patience, and compassion” in the healing process.

"Finding Balance: The Hidden Gift of Being Thrown Off-Course"

By Bridget Graff, DPT

In this second student essay focused on the Covid learning years, Bridget Graff details how her frustration with forced digital learning led her to discover a whole new perspective on life and work. Moving from being an active, dynamic, overworked student to one focused more on “*concepts*,” she developed a work-life “balancing act” that improved her academic performance—and will serve her for years to come.

"Resources for Finding Joy, and New Perspective"

By Madison Beasley, SPT and Nela Handac, PT, DPT

In this issue's Resource section, Madison Beasley and Nela Handac provide a thoughtful list of resources curated to spark joy and lead to new perspectives. Offering options from a variety of multimedia sources, these engaging pieces serve as a reminder of the important role of tending to our well-being and fostering joy and creativity.

About the Author



Dr. Sarah Blanton is a Professor of Rehabilitation Medicine at Emory University School of Medicine, Division of Physical Therapy. She graduated from the University of Virginia in 1987 with a BA degree in biology, from Emory University in 1992 with her masters in physical therapy and received her clinical doctorate in physical therapy in 2003. Dr. Blanton has had several research grants exploring the integration of caregivers into the rehabilitation process and her current research focus examines the impact of using a telehealth platform for the delivery of a theory-based, family-focused intervention program for stroke survivors and their carepartners in the home setting. Dr. Blanton's Lab, DISCOVER (Digital Scholarship Enhancing Rehabilitation), explores various ways digital scholarship can enhance rehabilitation research, education and clinical practice and promote interdisciplinary collaboration. Dr. Blanton is a Fellow of the National Academy of Practice in Physical Therapy. In 2018, she was awarded the American Physical Therapy Association Societal Impact Award and the Emory University Creativity and Arts award for healthcare faculty.

Dr. Blanton's interest in the *Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation* stems from her ongoing exploration of the intersections of creativity and spirituality to gain insight into the human experience of suffering, joy and mystery. In her teaching, she has found the use of narrative to be an exceptionally powerful tool to foster reflection and personal insight for both students and patients. In her research, she is incorporating multimedia formats to develop family education interventions in the home environment. A photographer since childhood, she has enjoyed sharing her artwork through exhibits at Emory University, speaking with chaplaincy students on "Reflections of Art and Spirituality in Appalachia" and as a guest contributor to the Public Radio show, *On Being*.