Contributors

Geoffrey Marsh aged 80 — less research, more reflections ...!
geoffreymarsh25@yahoo.co.uk

John GR Howie was the professor of general practice at Edinburgh.
john.howie00@btinternet.com

Frank Sullivan Chair RCGP Research Paper Of The Year on behalf of the panel of judges.
f.m.sullivan@chs.dundee.ac.uk

Eric Bloomfield was born in London and qualified from UCH in 1955. Following house jobs and National Service in the RAMC he settled in general practice in Walthamstow and remained there for 34 years as Principal and Trainer. He was a Kellogg Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at McGill University, Montreal, and a Member of the RCGP for 30 years. Retiring as a Principal in 1993 he was a Medical Tribunal Member of the Appeals Service of the Ministry of Justice for 15 years thereafter.
allan.bloomfield@talktalk.net

Mike Fitzpatrick
mike.fitzpatrick@nhs.net

Graham Watt is professor of general practice in Glasgow. His article on Freda Kahlo (55(517): 646–647) was the most downloaded article from the Back Pages in 2009. (Annual BJGP downloads from PubMed now running at almost 900 000.)
g.watt@clinmed.gla.ac.uk

Faye McCleery is a GP trainee in Wishaw, Lanarkshire, and writes book reviews to pacify her appraiser. Practice access last weekend was restricted by 40 000 marching Orangemen, zealously guarding 16th century religious intolerance. How does one factor that into the QOF?
fayemccleery@hotmail.co.uk

David Watson
funny_linguist@hotmail.com

James Willis was a GP in Alton, Hampshire. No Orange marches there, though they do have QOF.
jarwillis@gmail.com

Shome Mistake. Readers may have been impressed by my scholarly commentary on John Berger's essay in our June issue (60(575): 464–465). One slight problem — I did not actually write it. The piece was written by, Err, Iona Heath, otherwise known as the President of the RCGP. My apologies to Iona — if I had a forelock to tug ...
Alec Logan
Deputy Editor
aleclogan@dial.pipex.com

Writing proper

Everyone knows how to write a lecture like the one I was asked 4 months ago to give this coming Wednesday (14 July). You start with a plan and get it written and finished well in advance. The trouble is, I don't work like that, never have, and that makes me feel guilty and inadequate.

No, I actually 'shy away' from writing any sort of plan — I explain to people who are surprised, or worried for me, that I think I am trying to dismantle my ideas into a sort of soup, like a caterpillar dissolving inside a chrysalis, adding anything and everything that I come across, in the hope (it is always a hope) that a butterfly will eventually emerge. And by butterfly I mean something exciting, bigger and more beautiful than I expected, something new, unplanned and spontaneous.

Part of my current new idea is that, thanks to McGilchrist's *The Master and His Emissary*, which I reviewed in the March Journal, I now have a better way of looking at this process: I understand now that what my instinct has been trying to get me to do all these years is to keep my ideas in my right hemisphere for as long as possible, and actively resist their being pinioned and stripped of their fluidity and life. Perhaps (I dare to think), there is no need to be ashamed of this process. Perhaps I don't need to describe it in terms like 'shying away', evoking the picture of a disappointing racehorse at a jump.

On the contrary, perhaps now I can take pride in the fact that I am doing something active, dangerous, difficult. Something necessary. And the extraordinary thing is, while I of course search out in my preparation relevant books, articles, and appropriate people to talk to, the things that actually contribute to the idea come from absolutely anywhere and everywhere. And you don't know where the ideas are going to come from in advance, however much it looks as if you did in retrospect — that is the power of the illusion. And the whole thing shimmers in a kind of infinitely interconnected coexistence, in a form which can somehow accommodate the innumerable incompatible truths of life.

This is the stage I love, pregnant with

rich potential. But like childhood I know it can't last. I know that if I am going to achieve my object of constructing (notice the interesting word) a thesis which is new and better in some way than what came before, which moves things forward, I am going to have to pass my precious idea, far bigger than I can see all at once, gently and anxiously, in some sort of order, through the narrow passageway of my corpus callosum, into the shiny, efficient, invaluable, machinery of the left hemisphere. All-too shiny, all-too-efficient, yet absolutely invaluable. And there, unless I am extremely vigilant, it will be seized on, pinioned, and forced into the straitjacket of the pre-existing pattern which it most nearly fits.

This is the seductive trap, the result will then be so safe and so defensible, because it will be so easy to justify in the terms in which the left hemisphere operates. But so little will be left of my precious butterfly. It won't be new. And it won't be true. So actually it won't be worth saying. It is only worth saying things which challenge the accepted patterns and move them, however slightly, towards truth.

So let me make it quite clear that my object, all of our objects, is to use the patterns, to use the language, because that is the only way we can record the truth, the only way we can examine it, the only way we can communicate it — but that process is a tool, and like all tools we must recognise its limitations and its dangers.

The abiding mistake is to understand thinking from the top down, in retrospect, as though we started with the structure. That is why people go on thinking that the way to measure the difficulty of writing a talk is to count the number of words. The only thing I am using the word-count for at the moment is to trim my butterfly so that it lasts exactly the time I have been allocated.

James' 2010 John Fry Lecture, Why Machines Need People, will be published on the Royal Society of Medicine website by the time the BJGP goes to press.

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp10X515287