



FROM THE EDITOR



As I reviewed the layout for “Live at the Health Sciences Improv,” one of the stories featured in this issue, I realized I had finally written a story I said I would. It just took six years, and it would be my last as editor of this magazine.

Neither I nor Wayne Peay, who persuaded me as I sat in his office at the Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library, knew then what the story would be. I watched as he unrolled blueprints of a new building. *It’s going to be the first real health sciences building. Everyone will use it.* His voice, while never rushed, was infused with enthusiasm. *Here*, he explained, smoothing the drawings so I’d have the best perspective, *it’ll connect to the library with a bridge. The library will literally be the hub of the campus.*

Though Wayne directed the Eccles library, his focus wasn’t confined to book stacks. He, like other administrators, was envisioning how, by sharing a new space, students and faculty from the School of Medicine and colleges of Pharmacy, Nursing, and Health would really learn together. *It’s a great story*, he told me.

Intentions don’t always translate into great articles. Yet, in the 20-some years I’ve interviewed leaders at University of Utah Health Sciences, from department chairs to deans to vice presidents, I’ve learned to heed what they say, for it’s given me insight into what they see: blueprints for the future. In 1996, I was told that gene-targeting technology Mario Capecchi had discovered was worthy of the Nobel Prize. Those leaders were indeed right. The first profile of the geneticist in the Winter 1998 *Health Sciences Report* won awards from the Association of American Medical Colleges and Utah communication professionals. This spring, the special publication honoring the 2007 Nobel Laureate—*A Tribute to Mario R. Capecchi, Ph.D.*—won a second round of awards.

The framed certificates hang on the walls of my office next to mementos I’ve collected over the years: a painting of “Frosty the Snowman on Dialysis” by five-year-old Shelby who had chronic kidney disease. He was featured in an annual report in the late 1980s; his art, on the “Today” show. Above that is a black-and-white photo of Logan, a 12-year-old flexing his left arm for the first time on the magazine’s cover in 1998. His skin is a literal mosaic of scars, but he’s smiling. He can’t wait to leave for the hospital’s burn camp. Then there are two broadsides from Utah’s second Poet Laureate whom I worked with in a physicians’ literature and medicine group. After he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2005, Ken Brewer furiously wrote poems collected in a posthumous book. The broadside of his introduction, illustrated and framed, concludes: “Upon being told my life was about to end, I wrote the first poem as if it were a boat of words launched toward places I have never been.” Above my desk are three questions that end Mary Oliver’s poem “The Swan”: “And did you feel it, in your heart, how it pertained to everything? And have you too finally figured out what beauty is for? And have you changed your life?”

An academic health sciences center is an extraordinary place to work, where life and death are challenged in myriad new ways every day. Few have the privilege to know clinicians and researchers, therapists and students who are not only exceptionally intelligent and creative, but passionate about what they do for the lives of others. After listening to their stories, I, too, have been inspired to look into the future and envision a new role for myself. This fall, I’ll begin the doctoral program in communication and rhetoric at the U of U. I have a fellowship to teach in the University Writing Program and plan to research and write about interpersonal communication in medicine, particularly writing by patients and physicians, and how the expression and exchange of ideas can influence their relationship. It’s an expansion, actually, of the many stories I’ve written for this magazine.

Which include my final feature, “Live at the Health Sciences Improv.” Students from medicine, pharmacy, nursing, and health listen to each other interview standardized patients, then together develop a diagnosis and treatment plan. The point is not to follow a script for teamwork, but to trust yourself and improvise, which is perhaps the best way to learn to embody respect, empathy, and compassion: qualities we all need working in health care. It’s a story whose telling has been enriched with time and all that I’ve learned from everyone at the health sciences center. Many, many thanks—

SUSAN SAMPLE