

Fare Thee Well, Cap'n Jack: An Editor Salutes His Predecessor

Andrés Martin, MD, MPH

In the last months of his life, Dad latched on at one point to the metaphor of himself as a lighthouse, acknowledging perhaps that he was entering a final, more grounded stage of his life. It wasn't that he imagined himself holding the light. It was that he felt he had seen where so many of the rocks and hazards were. He wanted most to help guide us all, through the storms that can roil the mind, the dangers we may encounter.

—Elizabeth McDermott: Eulogy, January 10, 2016

I first met Jack McDermott a decade ago. I had heard of the man, of course, but never met him, so when applying for the editorship of *JAACAP*, I reached out to the illustrious former editor and set up a time to speak. The time difference with Hawaii made our first call even more exciting and mystifying: I was, after all, seeking the advice of a storied sage on distant shores. But as soon as we began speaking, the mists and mysteries evaporated. The old master was responsive, interested, kind, attentive, and witty. A new friendship was instantly born.

From those first days, most of what he shared about the *Journal* proved to be helpful and on point. Even when my experience didn't right away resonate with his, I found comfort in knowing I stood in good company, as when I faced a bruising reappointment five years later: "The Academy loves its *Journal*," he told me, "but addressing its leadership can feel like walking up the gallows. Mel Lewis warned me of as much. You heard it here first."

We were both connected to the *Journal*'s history and past, but it was around its future that our collaboration really took off. Within days of being appointed editor-elect, I ran by Jack the idea of creating a new position for editors-in-training. He jumped at the notion and within a few short months, just as I was learning the ropes, we were able to roll out and fund through philanthropic support the John F. McDermott Assistant Editor-in-Res-

idence position. We both took enormous pride in knowing that this joint venture had been the very first project by the *Journal*'s sixth editor—in close collaboration with its fourth. Jack and I pored over the many applications we received and struggled with narrowing and finalizing our decisions. We were star-struck by the talent we identified, and developed meaningful and close personal relationships with each of the first three incumbents, Schuyler W. Henderson, Stacy S. Drury, and Michelle S. Horner. He was instrumental in helping select the fourth, Oliver M. Stroeh, but Jack's untimely passing did not permit their collaboration to flourish.

The assistant editorship took off under Jack. He reveled in collaborating with colleagues this young, bright, and energetic. His excitement was palpable. He found in Schuyler a scholar and wordsmith as fine as himself; he helped Michelle develop *JAACAP Connect*, on which pages this and other tributes are now published. In bringing Stacy together with the late E. James Anthony, he connected disparate generations of child psychiatrists, making a seemingly unlikely pairing seem in retrospect obvious, scientifically synergistic, even pre-ordained. Turning inchoate ideas into actual projects brought out the best of the lighthouse in Jack. There were the political shoals, of course, as well as the reefs of self-doubt and of dealing with rejection—of dealing with *me*, I suppose. But he was much less about the shoals and the dangers than about the excitement of the adventure ahead, of new vistas still to be discovered. As he stated in a message to Michelle,

You were truly the navigator who found and developed *JAACAP Connect*. That was such an original contribution, and a unique discovery for you. It reminds me of the ancient Polynesian voyagers, who looked up in the sky to see their map unfolding. Like them, you and the other editors-in-residence

have found a veritable guide-path of stars to choose from – and guide us across thousands of miles of the unknown. Each of you has discovered your own star, under which you have sailed further and further.

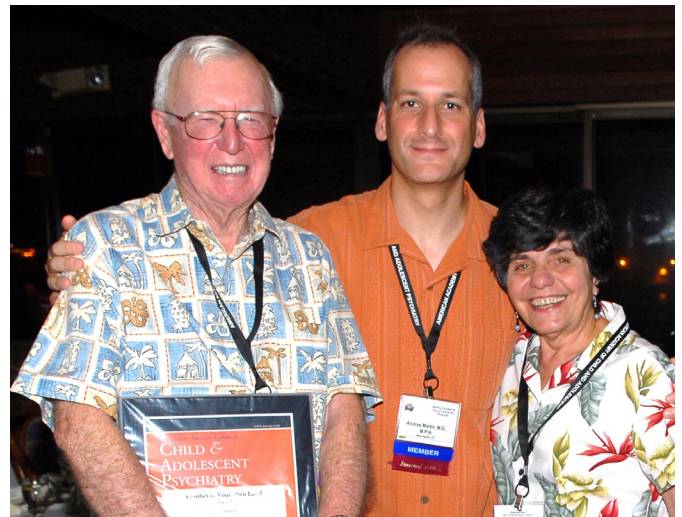
I couldn't keep *this* Jack all to the *Journal* and to myself – it did not seem fair. I wanted to share him with others, especially younger colleagues. To this end, I invited him as a speaker to a breakfast aimed at medical students, residents, and early-career psychiatrists. He had not heard of the breakfast format before, and was amused by the concept: “Will they serve cereal? Cap'n Crunch, perhaps?” From that day on, he affectionately called me “Cap'n Crunch.” I had no option but to reply in kind: and so, “Cap'n Jack” came to be. From that time on, we dubbed each other with increasingly over-the-top, fantastical nicknames and *noms de plume*. One of our last email exchanges is telling, tuned as it was to the North Korean events du jour: “Greetings, Oh Radiant Great One!” I saluted. Not one to be undone, Jack retorted, “Dear Leader: Any radiance is simply a reflection of your brilliance, Oh Sun God.” One way of distilling our friendship down to its core is this: we never ran out of superlatives to express our affection for one another. I miss him so much. Who else will call me “Sun God” now?

Other invitations followed. He was too good a guest, and too gracious to pass on any of them. When I asked him to write the forward for the new edition of Lewis's Textbook,¹ I had only one condition for him: somehow, somewhere, include your beloved Emily Dickinson in there. He gladly complied²:

A WORD is dead
When it is said,
Some say.
I say it just
Begins to live
That day.

Her poem provided a springboard for Jack's words, which are as true for that edited volume as they are for the *Journal* we have both been privileged to lead, as

each “insists upon the continuity of our field, teaching us how to listen to the young voices who are just beginning to live. Its words are alive; in them are both the continuity and the change that are our field.”³ His knowledge of Dickinson's body of work was encyclopedic, and one he had earned while hard at work during one of the “graceful retirements” he had become such an expert on. He studied Dickinson's works deeply and published his findings in scholarly poetry journals (e.g.,⁴). He became an expert on topics as diverse and wide-ranging as raising sheep and the history of the Hawaiian monarchs. How I would have loved to be guided by the good Cap'n in his late-life role as docent at the Hawai'i State Museum of Natural and Cultural History.



Dr. Catherine DeAngelis (Editor Emerita, JAMA), and Dr. Andrés Martin (Editor-in-Chief, JAACAP) present the ‘Prophet in Your Own Land Award’ to Dr. John F. McDermott (Editor Emeritus, JAACAP) at the 56th AACAP Annual Meeting, held in Honolulu, Hawai'i, in 2009.

At what turned out to be my last invitation to him, Jack agreed to join the San Antonio 2015 Annual Meeting presentation “TED Talks Meet Perspectives: (Clinical) Ideas Worth Spreading.” He had not been aware of TED Talks before, but was, needless to say, a quick study. We debated about his topic. I was so inspired by the new lives he had crafted after his professional retirement that I wanted him to expand on the pithy jewel he wrote in 2014.⁵ He grudgingly agreed, but I could sense his discomfort. Some months later he let me know he did

not want to talk about retirement after all. He had had enough of the topic, and had Big Ideas in mind instead:

I took your advice to heart...and have revised my TED talk. It will now feature the changing mind/brain relationship, past, present, and future, including futuristic 2050 Buck Rogers (dating me) treatments as the new model—of mind emerging from brain—illuminates us in child and adolescent psychiatry. The title should be changed to: “Are the Mind and Brain the Same or Separate?” I hope this is acceptable to you.

Aloha

Your Loyal Servant

The false dichotomy of mind–body dualism had long piqued his interest, where he stood side by side his dear Belle of Amherst:⁶

The brain is just the weight of God,
For, lift them, pound for pound,
And they will differ, if they do,
As syllable from sound.

Indeed, in his December 1997 valedictory editorial, he addressed the mind–brain connection head on. He welcomed the opportunity, noting that “if it’s true what they say, that textbooks tell you what’s already happened, and journals tell you what’s going to happen, then perhaps [my] experience [as editor] can serve as a pathfinder into the future.”⁷ His predictions were mostly accurate and prescient: he may not have had the terms for “epigenetics,” “RDoC,” “GxE interaction,” or “virtual reality,” but they are all in there, accurately foretold. He had envisioned a joint child and adolescent psychiatry meeting between Americans and Europeans in Paris in 2027: as we prepare for such a meeting in San Sebastian, Spain later this year, we can’t really fault the forecaster for being off by a decade and five hundred miles.

We will find out who our successor will be in June 2016, when the *Journal’s* seventh editor will be appointed. Jack, Mina, and I have already sent our best wishes, as we “look forward to reading issues yet to come and wish hearty Godspeed to the editor who will succeed us in our humbling charge.”⁸ To this sentiment I can only add my fervent hope for a new editor imbued with a touch of the grace, elegance, wisdom, and kindness of this great man. I salute you, Cap’n Jack, *O Captain! my Captain!*, as I thank you for your personal guidance through storms—and for allowing us all to envision new shores.

References

1. Martin A, Volkmar FR (Eds). *Lewis’s Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: A Comprehensive Textbook, Fourth Edition*. Baltimore: Lippincott Williams and Wilkins; 2007.
2. Dickinson E. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Boston: Little, Brown; 1924; Bartleby.com, 2000. www.bartleby.com/113/ [last accessed January 23, 2016] Part I, Life: LXXXIX
3. McDermott JF. “Foreword.” In *Lewis’s Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: A Comprehensive Textbook, Fourth Edition*. Baltimore: Lippincott Williams and Wilkins; 2007: vii.
4. McDermott JF. Emily Dickinson’s ‘Nervous Prostration’ and its possible influence on her work. *The Emily Dickinson Journal*. 2000;9:71-86.
5. McDermott JF. Retiring Gracefully. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. 2012;51:979-981.
6. Dickinson E. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Boston: Little, Brown; 1924; Bartleby.com, 2000. www.bartleby.com/113/ [last accessed January 23, 2016] Part I, Life: CXXVI
7. McDermott JF. Looking at the Future Through Orange-Colored Glasses. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. 1997; 36:1653-1655.
7. McDermott JF, Dulcan MK, Martin A. The *Journal* at the Academy’s Sixtieth Anniversary. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. 2013;52:1001-1003.

About the Author

Andrés Martin, MD, MPH, is editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*.

Disclosure: Dr. Martin has received grant or research support from the National Institute of Mental Health. He has received royalties from Wolters Kluwer.