

MIND TO MIND

Creative writing that explores the abstract side of our profession and our lives

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Ganesh Furtado, M.D., ... My Cat

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Ganesh is not just a cat, but already a doctor, and in a couple of months he will be a senior anesthesiologist. He may be considered as being mostly theoretical, but at the same time he is sensitive and romantic, even philosophical. He is also clever and he strikes without warning.

Doctor Ganesh Furtado (Ganesh to his friends) is a 10-year-old European male cat. His fur is black with symmetrical white spots in the abdomen and neck. His eyes are green and he weighs 7 kg.

Doctor Ganesh had been abandoned on the street, he was probably just around 4 months old when I took him home with me. At the time, I was a third-year medical student, and in my company Ganesh quickly took up the challenge of becoming a doctor.

It required studying a lot, which he handled with pride. Anatomy, however, proved to be his main flaw, as it was a first-year discipline of mine, so one we never studied together. To this day, he still struggles in regional anesthesia... But he could keep up the pace in biochemistry and physiology, to the point of becoming a real pro in ventilation mechanics.

When we sit together to study, he likes to lie on my lap or over my books, so he can have a closer look at all contents. Sometimes he falls asleep, but I believe he knows that sleep enhances neural plasticity and contributes to consolidate his acquired knowledge (fig. 1).

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Fig. 1. Ganesh consolidating his acquired knowledge.

When he is bored, he plays with the pens and pencils lying on the desk, but when he is stressed because of exams and long hours of studying, he attacks people.

Ganesh's "work" was first cited in my first-year anesthesiology trainee examination. I was struggling to write my annual report, when I noticed that everybody else's report opened with a handsome epigraph by some famous author. Most of them were by well-known authors, and many of them were not even related to medicine, they were inspirational cheesy sentences, trivial, even futile. I found myself refusing to adopt such an attitude and style. However, it hit me, this represented the chance to share the thoughts and the written work of my favorite friend and doctor, Ganesh, my cat.

So, the opening quote of my first-year internship report read: *"it started with method, hypnotized by the end, where sleep awaits, where there is no time, no beginning and no end, only the calm of Morpheus"* Ganesh said (in a pretentious tone). And the examiners took it, even loved it! From then on, every single year as a trainee, Ganesh was there for me, providing the thoughts and sentences that added some meaning to the numbers on my reports. But Ganesh became present beyond my reports. Answering challenging theoretical questions in my annual exams, when I could not recall the name of some famous author of some important studies, I found myself claiming Doctor Ganesh as responsible for those amazing results and accomplishments.

My cat thus swiftly became accepted as a medical researcher, as well as a quotable and respectable author. I acknowledge and congratulate him for such a remarkable achievement. Why this happened is the question.

To answer this I must tell you that by no means is my cat a pioneer in this field. The first (known) animal to be quoted was Chester Willard, back in 1975,¹ as co-author of a peer-reviewed physics paper “Two-, Three-, and Four-Atom Exchange Effects in bcc ^3He ,” published in *Physical Review Letters*, a paper describing helium-3 isotope exchanges with temperatures.² Jack H. Hetherington, a professor of physics at Michigan State University, and his cat are still quoted today for “their” important findings.

I think Doctors Ganesh and Chester are a good connection, illustrating what I believe medical writing is turning into nowadays, and the direction I fear it is currently taking. As I am about to complete my five-year training in anesthesiology, I realize that the obligation of publication in our career makes scientific writing “look easy” and even meaningless. When I open a scientific journal, even a good one, frequently a paid-for-publishing one, I struggle to find a good paper. By that I mean something that will bring innovation to my daily practice, or that will make me think about some subject, or even that will show some negative data about something (the absence of negative trials is, on its own, one of the main problems in scientific publication).³ I mean simply free, honest, and good quality information.

After my first published article in a peer-reviewed journal,⁴ I started to receive daily emails from *Dermatology Kanquestan Journal*, *American Journal of Meaningless Stuff*, even *Orthopedic Distant Land Journal*, and the list goes on, calling for article submissions. They want anything, everything. But is this science, I wonder. In my opinion, this is science being taken over by consumer society and the ethos of productivity indicators.

We are led to think that our medical careers are only complete with publications. This is what leads to medical misinformation, to doubt, to bad practices, to mortality.

This made me think... why doesn't the American Society of Anesthesiology apply the principle of the American Physical Society that, a few years ago, announced it extended the benefits of open access to feline and canine authors?⁵ If my work is innovative, what's the difference if my cat is the fifth author? It's just a name, the unseen face of the publication, he will be there for science and, by the same token, for everyone's wallets. He would be the door for free information. Why not use comedy and our pets in the name of science?

I'm sure, that in this publishing industry, someday, there will be a place for free papers with the highest scientific quality by the best anesthesiologist of all times, Doctor Ganesh Furtado, my cat!

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