



WINDOWS—2010

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Tangible things are often born of evanescent ideas—the gossamer “what ifs?” that run head-on into the immutable “why not?”

Those few remaining souls who were there the fateful night The University of Pennsylvania Orthopaedic Journal (UPOJ) was conceived will never forget how perilously close it came to not being. The air was frightfully still; then someone rose to open a window, and in a moment, an idea was born. There are moments when an inspired individual peers down the long corridor of history and sees the answer almost before the question is asked—who can see the apple tree before the seed is planted. The details are best left to the imagination.

The UPOJ was the brainchild of a single visionary leader, Dr. Carl Brighton, who nurtured it in into existence against withering opposition. That night the window was opened, and in the past 25 years it has never been shut. Some years have admitted gentle breezes, and others, the hallowing winds of change—but always fresh air. Where we have looked out, others have looked in. For the past quarter of a century, it has been our window on the world.

From “Voices at an Open Window” (reproduced in its entirety from the opening pages of volume I) to “Windows—2010,” a glorious quarter of a century of the UPOJ.

Voices at an Open Window

Frederick S. Kaplan, MD

*I looked out the window at dawn
And saw a young apple tree translucent in brightness.
And when I looked out at dawn once again,
An apple tree laden with fruit stood there.
Many years have probably gone by,
But I remember nothing of what happened in my sleep¹*

[From Volume I of the University of Pennsylvania
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The dictionary defines a window as “an opening in the wall of a building for the admission of light and air”². Ever since man put a roof over his head, it is likely that he cut holes in the supporting walls to see and hear what has happening around him.

In downtown Philadelphia more than 200 years ago, a group of renegade colonists met in a crowded and stuffy room of the Pennsylvania State House to define the meaning of liberty for themselves and their descendants. Among those early statesmen was Thomas Jefferson, the author of the unanimous Declaration of Independence, and an accomplished architect. He understood, perhaps more than any other representative, the collective voice that would emanate from those windows on Chestnut Street and circle the globe.

Unlike other architects of his day, Jefferson paid enormous attention to windows. A visitor to Monticello, his imposing

Palladian mansion near Charlottesville, Virginia, will recognize the importance its designer placed on light and air. Jefferson created the triple-hung window that extends down to the floor and can be used as an alternate doorway³. Like Jefferson’s windows, this journal is our window, our special invention for our stories and our work. Through it, we hope to see our department and to hear its voices, to document our creations and our recreations, to set sign posts at new intersections, to watch ourselves grow and develop, to record who we are and who we can become, to explore our common link and our common heritage, and to preserve those places, those poses, and those ideas that tell us where we have been and where we intend to go. Our goal is, as Conrad claimed, “to try to find what is fundamental, enduring, essential”⁴.

As Montaigne noted, “It is not only for an exterior show or ostentation that our soul must play her part, but inwardly within our self, where no eyes shine but ours. It is our duty to compose our character. We are so many different people at once”⁵. Our department is more than its affiliated hospitals, more than its associated services, more than its list of attendings, residents, and students, more than its compilation of bibliographies, and symposiums. Those may be our walls but they are not our windows. Our department, like any complex being, has personality, character, verve, and voice; in essence a living soul, uniquely its own. But, without its human contributions, it is like a stone temple, foreboding, haunting and without life. The philosopher William James said, “Organization and method mean much, but contagious human character mean more in a university”⁶.

We already, it may be argued, have windows and doors—ways to communicate with the outside world: meeting, symposiums, periodicals, courses, conventions, conferences, and chronicles—so why another journal? Be admonished,” said Ecclesiastes, “of making many books, there is no end”⁷.

Our goal here is to create not just another window but a window through which we can walk and look back at ourselves. We should be able to watch the apple tree grow rather than wonder, years later, what happened to it in our sleep. Like the solitary architect and author at home on the Virginia hillside, or at work in the city of Philadelphia, it is time to open this unique window, wind our way between the mullions, and listen, if even for a moment, to ourselves think. We may hear voices that sound familiar and voices that we have never before heard.

References:

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