

# A Resolution for 2013

By Dr Natalie Koh, Editorial Board Member

It is quite frightening, writing for others to read.

In agreeing to have one's writing published, one must summon up the courage to brave judgement and stand by one's point of view, which needn't always make sense to most, or even be popular. And on an even more visceral note, one must overcome that most basic of fears – self-doubt and insecurity. And all these are to be done in your own voice.

It's almost as though you're on stage, alone, spotlight on you, and the audience is in the dark. A deep breath, and off you go.

It was purely by chance that over the holidays, I read a speech, entitled "Posthumous", by Jeffrey Eugenides (author of the brilliant *Middlesex*), which he gave to a group of talented young writers at the 2012 Whiting Awards. In it, he talks about the importance of writing always for yourself, without censorship, or reservation, without consideration for what's in fashion or publishable. He talks of the notion of the writing life being akin to "dying your whole life", that there is "something about writing that demands a leave-taking, an abandonment of the world, paradoxically, in order to see it clearly".

I remembered that in the past, when I was younger and blogging had just taken off, I had written short snippets to be posted on a blog which was read only by my closest friends, a means to keep in touch if you will, given our divergent lives. To recall that joy of writing, I reread what I'd written then, and loved all of it. All the drama and the mess and the fuss, all that "nothing" was actually "something". They were Polaroids, blurry but spontaneous, of a girl in flux. And even though time had left them in the dark, coming back to them made me realise their timelessness lay in their honesty.

I used endless exams and a crazy housemanship year as reasons why I stopped writing. But now with the Practical Assessment of Clinical Examination Skills (PACES) exam out of the way and also some time to take leave from the whole pressure cooker system of qualifications and more postgraduate studies – the writing is slowly coming back again. I can see a little clearer now.

As this is the first time we're meeting each other, dear reader, I'd like to promise that I shall try my best to write "posthumously", with some degree of abandonment and conviction.

This being the start of the new year, I have often been asked what my resolutions are. I fobbed my friends off by telling them

I make resolutions on my birthday instead (I rarely do), but when a friend asked, "How then do you take stock?", it struck me that given the pretty eventful year 2012 was, with its many milestones, it'd be good to do a little spring cleaning.

It has been a long road, from the start of medical school in 2004 till its end in 2009, then housemanship till 2010, followed by residency from 2011 and finally, being done with PACES last year. As we all know, the postgraduate system has changed like shifting sands these past few years and to me, it felt like a game of jump rope. One hoped to jump within the number of times given and not get caught. I was never very good at skipping (I tried very hard at it when I heard movie actresses who jumped rope had fantastic abs). Thankfully though, things have worked out and we have now come to a period of relative peace. Before the senior residency teething begins again...

A lot of comparison has been made between the old system and the new, with the transition into the new one being fraught with the difficulties one would expect with conversion. While the full cycle of any residency has yet to be completed, as part of this system, my hope is that with feedback, it can evolve and adapt before settling into its ways. That this would be a system that will be flexible and agile enough to cope with the constantly changing face of healthcare, and with the diverse interests of young doctors now flooding the market.

All vague notions without concrete plans, I hear you say. But the sentiment is there, and in line with my New Year's resolution, "I will not live in the past." Looking forward, with constructive feedback, many voices put together can effect some change, no?

Or maybe one small voice on a stage, in a room so quiet, a pin drop echoes loudly enough for all to hear.

*To live as though every day were our last, to write as though we would not be judged, to face the moment and embrace it, and jump the rope as best as we can.*

This is my resolution for 2013. Happy New Year! **SMA**



*Dr Natalie Koh is a second year Internal Medicine resident with SingHealth. She graduated from the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine in 2009. Whenever possible, she spends her time at home reading, and hopes in vain to become a MasterChef by watching the Food Network channel.*