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So far, I have not found the science ...
—Soul Coughing

Science is everywhere—in labs, in hospitals, in our food, in our iPhones, and, in fact, in virtually all to which we are exposed and which we experience each day. Yet, somehow, it's not always easy for people to understand the “scientific method”—the process of making an observation, creating a hypothesis to explain that observation, doing an experiment to prove or refute that hypothesis—and relate science to their daily lives. The lack of science literacy in our country is one of our greatest challenges in sustaining our national momentum.

As a young boy, I was fortunate to have a guide. My first cousin Donald Glaser served as my “big brother” as we grew up together in Cleveland. Don, a decade older than me, was driven both to discover and to share the joy of discovery with me, his mentee. Later, Don became a physicist and went on to invent a device called the “bubble chamber,” which allowed us to visualize subatomic particles for the first time. In 1960, at 34, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics. Don later moved his interest to molecular biology and biotechnology (an early company that he cofounded commercialized the polymerase chain reaction). Still later, like Francis Crick, he evolved into a neurobiologist. Don died a few weeks ago, and I shall miss my lifelong model and mentor greatly.

As a university, we have a responsibility and an opportunity to mentor the young and impressionable on an institutional scale. To this end, in 2010 we established the Office of Science Education Outreach in the Health Sciences. This office formalizes and facilitates several long-standing, as well as new, outreach efforts. Through these efforts, we open our labs to youth. These young people—some perhaps future Donald Glasers—learn the scientific method by doing science side by side with our faculty. And each year, we host hundreds of students in our summer science programs. We also have a rewarding relationship with the Pittsburgh Science & Technology Academy, which the Pittsburgh Public Schools opened in September 2009. It's just a few blocks from our home in Scaife Hall. Our faculty serve as mentors to “SciTech” seniors, who also attend many of the lectures held here on research subjects of broad interest.

In addition, thousands of kids have delved into human genetics, developmental biology, and other topics after climbing into our 70-foot-long tractor-trailer, a mobile science lab established by our NIH-funded Clinical and Translational Science Institute. The truck circulates among the public schools and adds substantially to the science exposure offered by those schools.

Others support our efforts as well: Various agencies, foundations, and professional societies fund programs that bring the curious to us and bring science to the curious.

My wife and I visited Don and his wife at their home in Berkeley just a few months ago. I was very moved by Don, after we had had our fill of science talk, grasping his rescue dog's head between his palms and speaking gently, face to face and at some length, to his pet. In that instant, he captured the existence that we share with all of life; it is the interrogation of the mechanisms of this life that fills us with passion as scientists and as physicians. I think that my cousin would have liked the latest addition to this magazine. Flip to the inside back cover, and you'll find our new section—“For Real!”—intended for the Justin Bieber generation. I hope you'll share it with every young person you know.

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