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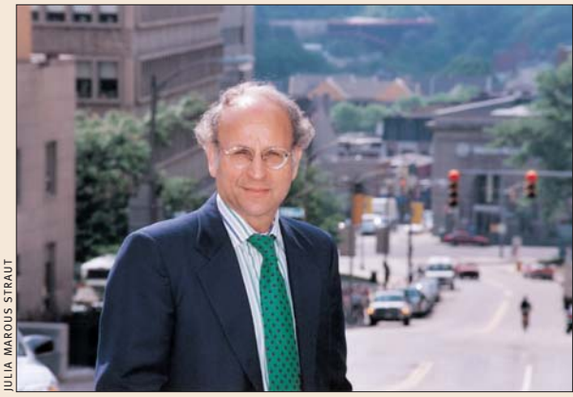
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JULIA MAROUS STRAUT

The ship sprang through the water like a thing possessed. The sail being nearly all forward, it lifted her out of the water … had it been life or death with every one of us, she could not have borne another stitch of canvas.

—Richard Henry Dana
Two Years Before the Mast

I am a sailor, and have been, on and off, since my days as an intern in Minneapolis, the city of lakes. I love sailing—it's both exhilarating and innervating—and it requires all of my psychic and cognitive energy to balance the boat (a Flying Scot!) between wind and water, leaving me no time to worry about NIH monies, conflicts of interest, unfunded mandates, the state appropriation, or the cost of malpractice insurance—unless I want to end up in the drink.

But there are days when conditions are perfect and seductive, and it's tempting to kick back. The water is azure, sparkling beneath a brilliantly clear sky. The wind drives me forward, its vector is constant, and the boat is fast. On a recent weekend day like this, with the sail out in a broad reach, I allowed my mind to wander as the Scot glided. Suddenly, an unanticipated gust filled the sail and swung it around so quickly that the boom almost knocked me out of the boat. So much for letting the mind wander .

Sailing is my escape from the demands of work, from my thoughts about where our nation is headed, and even from my beloved science and medicine. And after that smack from the boom, I realized that sailing is not unlike science and medicine—it demands high vigilance and certain discipline, lest we find ourselves flipped out of the boat.

At the School of Medicine, our job is to nurture creative, analytical, evidence-based thinking in our students. Our graduates must demonstrate a monolithic habit of mind—the ability to focus with extraordinary clarity and intensity. Beginning this year, our students will find that research (or, more broadly, a substantive exposure to scholarship) is a mandatory part of the new curriculum. Most of our entering students will spend their first summer pursuing research and then carry a scholarly research project through to graduation. Our rationale for this new requirement reflects, in part, our obligation to expose more students to the possibility of a life in medical research at a time when the number of physician-investigators continues to decline nationally, thereby thwarting the translation of our spectacular advances at the laboratory bench to medicine at the bedside. As importantly, we believe that the successful experience of hypothesis-driven, independent research will give our students confidence in their ability to think about complex illness in creative and analytical terms—beyond the confines of textbook knowledge.

They will need to display extraordinary discipline and singleness of purpose to carry this through. But success will speed our graduates into the world with intellectual acuity, and perhaps also an awakened zeal for scholarship. Another sailor, Walt Whitman, wrote this:

Our life is closed—our life begins;
The long, long anchorage we leave,
The ship is clear at last—she leaps!
She swiftly courses from the shore;
Joy! shipmate—joy!

Arthur S. Levine, MD
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