



cerned about the impact of these trends on the teaching and practice of psychiatry. A growing number of psychiatric residency programs, he laments, are providing inadequate psychotherapy training, and HMOs are reducing the role of the psychiatrist to that of drug dispenser. The net result is that patients become merely pieces of flawed chemistry to be put in order by the appropriate agent or combination of agents. No attempt is made to understand the problem or to offer treatment in a broader context.

These are cautionary tales. They tell us that today's gospel could well be tomorrow's lie, that the pendulum of opinion in the mind-brain debate, left unchecked, swings in extremes.

Why should this be so? The answer may lie in the nature of psychiatric and psychological problems themselves. Understanding difficulties and disorders in this domain goes

to the existential core of what it is to be human. Are we agents of our own destiny, or are we driven by biology and fate? Are fear, depression and even madness within our control, or beyond it? What is our right mind? Where is the fault? Who is to blame?

Our sense of our humanity is always evolving, bound by the conflicting cultural currents within a society at a given point in time. Dolnick speculates that perhaps one of the reasons the post-war era so readily embraced the totality of psychoanalytical thought was a need to understand the evils that had been unleashed by World War II, which provided more than enough evidence of the death instinct that Freud had conceptualized. If *thanatos* could be understood, could it perhaps be tamed? Valenstein, for his part, examines the economic imperative. The resources and influences of large corporate structures within a consum-

erist culture are capable of moulding accepted opinion and determining what is valued.

The lesson is that societal context not insignificantly informs the illusory impartiality of science and medical practice. They do not sit in some rarefied, pristine atmosphere dealing with an absolute and constant truth. Rather, they are embedded in the fabric and history of the societies that generate them.

These books call on us to see beyond our own immediate period and locate ourselves on the trajectory drawn by the shifting coordinates of the mind-brain debate. These perspectives can only help us in advocating the most humane and balanced treatment possible for our patients.

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*Room for a view*

## It's a dog's life: opening day

I always wanted to be a bird dog. Not just any hunting dog, but a retriever.

I had it all: a sensitive nose, balanced webbed feet and a wonderfully full tail for a rudder. Some of the other pups may have been stronger or faster, but rarely did they outperform me. Not with my determination.

I didn't always have a hunting master to train me, so I prepared for my chance when master was away at work by practising with slippers I'd steal and hide. I'd chase and wade through the thickest and deepest imaginary swamps. Finally, I'd find the scent, make the retrieve and perfectly present to the waiting hand of an imaginary master. Sometimes my real master would punish me for stealing when he got home, but I al-

ways forgave him. He didn't know I was preparing to be the best retriever I could be.

Eventually I found a dedicated master. We worked long hours together. He didn't believe in treats and wasn't really into petting or scratching ears. Still, I was happy since he was always ready for another retrieve. He ended the sessions by securing me in the garage with my cage locked. Bird dogs aren't allowed in the house. He really cared about me.

The big day finally came. Opening day! We had trained hard and I was tired but in good shape. I hadn't slept much the night before. Actually, I was exhausted since the neighbours

had a pup that barked all night. This had been going on for so long that I was sure master knew. Or maybe he didn't, since his bedroom is on the other side of the house. It didn't really matter. It was opening day.

It was very cold, and ice had formed on the water. There was a great swamp with sticky black muck.

The kind that stays on your fur and smells for a couple of days. Over its scent you could almost touch the thick but fine aroma of birds and hunters. This was opening day!

Set in the blind, master drank something warm from a steel cup. I didn't mind sitting on the wet grass because from there I could get a glimpse of the birds. A good dog doesn't need to see where the birds fall, but I wanted that extra edge so I could prove I was the best.





Suddenly two ducks, a shot and a miss. “Is he ever going to shoot again?” I wondered. Finally, “*Boom*” — duck down! I saw it land far away, maybe 50 yards out. Off I went.

Retrieving has strict rules. Each master is different, but you have to remember every detail. But — between you and me — what’s the goal here? As long as the duck is in the bag, without teeth marks, retrieved safely and with finesse, shouldn’t that be good enough?

Rule 1: *Don’t retrieve until given the command.*

When that duck went down I know I heard master say “Fetch.” Retrieving is my job! That is the whole reason we were there. He would have said it soon. With no birds around, it was safe. You didn’t hear me complain when he missed the first bird. Now wouldn’t that have been something to talk about, a double, first thing, opening day!

Rule 2: *Stay within 40 yards of the master.*

That’s easy at home. This was opening day!

I was so excited I didn’t realize things could slow me down. I could easily travel 50 yards in the time he thought I was covering 40. But the ice broke, and with the muck and burs my quick dash over 40 was noticed. He couldn’t see me because of the dense brush I had fought through. He knew all this. He knew exactly where I had to go and what I had to do. Didn’t he? He’d done this before, hadn’t he?

Rule 3: *Obey the whistle.*

Every dog knows this is for safety. But this was opening day! Birds, shots and whistles everywhere. I always obeyed my master’s whistle, but I was so close when he first called.

At the very moment I caught the scent I heard “toot-toot-toot” — which means come. Didn’t he know that this was a long retrieve? I thought he would understand. Again, “toot-toot-toot.” At 50 yards was a

real heavy, beautifully coloured male. Boy, would master be proud!

“Toot-toot-toot.” Coming, master! Check out this beauty! First bird of the year, and it’s opening day! Are we a team or what?

From a distance I could see that master was distraught. He didn’t seem to see the duck. I wondered what had happened, since it was usually my fault when he looked this way. Check out this bird, master! Could only have been better had he shot both birds. Any other dog would have given up and come home empty jawed.

I perfectly presented the bird. He snatched it from my jaws. I didn’t expect praise or a pat on the head. I did expect him to admire the bird, since he was sure to brag about it to his buddies. Instead, I suddenly felt a cold sharp sting on my nose. I think it would have actually hurt had my nose not been so numb from the cold. I instantly heeled. Then came a hot, burning feeling on my rump. And then another. It was master’s leash. I

dropped to my belly. I didn’t complain. Luckily, the leash doesn’t really hurt that much when your coat is covered with swamp muck. But why didn’t he stop? It was opening day!

Completely exhausted and confused, I submitted unconditionally by exposing my belly. My eyes, now heavy with inexplicable emotions, drifted shut uncontrollably. I relished this brief chance to rest.

Only moments passed before I heard the sound of a “quack,” and then another. Master was ready. Gun to mount — two shots fired — one duck down. I heard it drop, far away. Still on my back, eyes shut, numb and emotionless, I wondered what would happen next.

Unexpectedly, I heard that most wonderful and favourite word: “Fetch.”

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## One thousand words



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Resident staff in the house surgeons’ quarters, Toronto General Hospital, 1898. From the collection of George H. Field (1872–1962), a physician, sometime ship’s surgeon and amateur photographer born in Cobourg, Ont. Field is standing at the back; the sign on the wall advertises “Doctors Special Brandy.” On the back of the photograph is the notation “A Common Occurrence.”