“Kilroy was here” – plus!

LAWRENCE A. SOLBERG

Why did the phrase “Kilroy was here” catch on, at least in my generation and the one before mine? After all, I did not know Kilroy nor do I remember the exact place or circumstances in WWII at which he scrawled his existential statement. I could, of course, look it up quickly on Google, but I won’t. Because what is intriguing is—why did his statement resonate with so many of us? He was not an author, a scientist, an editor, a statesman. He was just an ordinary person. I believe each reader already knows the answer to this question and finds that answer just springs magically and instantaneously from our shared existence or perhaps even our shared biology. We know that any one of us might be caught in an extraordinary circumstance, and we understand that expressions by individuals can represent us all. “Kilroy was here” caught on because we instinctively know we share life with all others.

Productive scientists get to leave what might be thought of as a “Kilroy was here” – plus! signature. Through their discovery and publication in basic or clinical science, they not only leave a written record much longer than Kilroy’s but also can directly improve the lives of patients with can-

cer. Certainly, this journal should continue publishing excellent clinical science and guidance.

But why publish poetry from patients or members of the health profession engaged in cancer? Outcomes will not change. Tenure will not be made. Many such authors are not scientists or writers or editors, although readers may be fortunate when a skilled writer does this! Often it is ordinary people from whom words and insights occasionally flow in the form of poetry—for reasons not understood by me. Perhaps it is just “Kilroy was here” plus—with a poem attached rather than a name only. I do believe that it is to the credit of this journal that it will occasionally publish materials from patients with cancer and those engaged in their care. It helps us all remember that each of us matters whether we scrawl a phrase on a wall, publish excellent science, or try to express some strong experience made while living or working with cancer. Certainly all patients who have ever taken steroids will recognize the insightful description from one of my patients about the effects of dexamethasone. And I have added some of my own scrawling. My patient and I were here!

Ode to Dex

Praise be to Dex!
Both boon and hex.
Counts down a lot
But glucose not.
Skin’s got too thin,
Head’s in a spin
Up before sun.
No work undone,
Face in fiery flush,
Mouth in full gush.

Manic-driven mouth,
Others driven south.
Grab your tummy med,
A rough ride’s ahead.
Organize the world,
Restraining every pearl.
That Dex downhill crash,
Worth the cancer smash!

—Frances Stelling

St. Augustine, Florida

(Penned in sillyspiration by an insomniac dexamaniac)

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My Friend, My Patient

So
 Here you are again
 We sit with our
 Phosphorylations and
 Dephosphorylations
 And
 Molecular dynamics
 The collisions
 And interactions, and separations
 And ionic currents and potentials
 And somewhere we know
 That we have these
 Images
 Of parts of our lives
 Somewhere
 In a most magical state
 Of compression
 Linked in
 Some magical way
 To our hearts
 our souls.
 And there they are
 Called in an instant
 In my mind
 Standing at the rail
 Waving goodbye
 They and I with
 Brave faces
 So long ago
 My beloved Parents
 And there we are
 My sweaty hands
 And that moment of comprehension

That all will be well
 As we look
 One at another
 Just before
 Our wedding
 My wife And I
 And there she is
 Legs pumping furiously
 The tricycle out ahead
 But I know soon
 On my side
 Clinging like
 A sucker-tube fish
 And I will be walking
 With the trike
 In my other hand
 My daughter and I
 All the eyes
 And hands
 I have seen
 Are there.
 And these
 Images are in your heart too
 My beloved patient
 And we comprehend this
 In the most instantaneous
 And magical way
 Somewhere
 Among the first principles
 And the grand-unified model
 And our souls.
 That we are the same

—Lawrence A. Solberg, PhD, MD

Severe Graft Versus Host Disease

So I am seeing you
 Somehow
 with the eyes of your Mother
 and your Father and
 those who love you..
 My own of course
 As if
 God and existence
 were pausing
 With respect for you
 and seeing you
 Through my eyes!
 I rub your back
 I try to encourage you
 With words
 I see your swollen painful mouth

Your pain and your drool
 You look at me
 And you are still
 So kind as to say
 “thank you!”
 So
 I go home
 Believing those whom I have loved
 My patients
 Those walking next to me for so long
 On our way to God
 They are pulling me
 Always
 Toward the good
 I can not achieve alone.

—Lawrence A. Solberg, PhD, MD