

# An ADA Educational Journey: The Places We Have Been, Oh, the Places We Will Go!

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*Editor's note: This article is adapted from the address of the American Diabetes Association President, Health Care & Education, given in June 2004 at the Association's 64th Annual Meeting and Scientific Sessions in Orlando, Fla.*

I would like to share the wisdoms, passions, and lessons I have learned from the educators and other volunteers I have met during my term as the American Diabetes Association (ADA) President, Health Care & Education this past year. My message has three focus areas:

1. The joy of the journey—the places we, the ADA, have been,
2. The people I have met and with whom I have shared information and diabetes education opportunities, and
3. The wisdoms I have come to live by through this experience.

## The Places We Have Been

Theodore Seuss Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss, has been a constant source of inspiration for me. His themes (Goodness triumphs. Bad is put down. People are good. The world can be improved.) have been my guide. In March 2004, we commemorated his 100th birthday. A theme park was created in his honor in his hometown of Springfield, Mass., near my own home and work. The park featured one of his famous children's books, "Oh the Places You Will Go," from which I will draw the closing words for this article.

My journey as an ADA officer was driven by my passion to make a difference. This passion was well-matched when I first became involved with the ADA and joined volunteers on their own journey to making an

everyday difference in the lives of those affected by diabetes. This shared mission has had a strong influence on the person I am today.

Former U.S. President Ronald Reagan once said, "Life begins when you begin to serve." With this as my inspiration, my volunteer life in the ADA began. I have had the opportunity to serve as an ADA leader in two states, Minnesota and Connecticut, as well as at the national level. Through these experiences, I have seen firsthand the growth and, yes, some struggles, within our organization. I served as President of the Minnesota Affiliate, one of the first nurses to serve in this capacity. In Connecticut, I was the first President, Health Care & Education of the Eastern Region (now known as the Northeast Region). Each role involved charting new courses for diabetes health professionals, new avenues from the original ADA organizational structure, and new opportunities far from the traditional roles of nurses and other health professionals.

This was a time of great growth, organizational change, and transition, which led us to our current community leadership councils. As Dr. Seuss would have said, "Oh, the places we have been!"

I have seen the role of health educators expand and gain recognition within the larger diabetes and health care community. ADA is the only voluntary health organization to publicly recognize its health professional educators by creating a position like President, Health Care & Education. Never in my early career would I have guessed that I would come to serve as one of the officers of the ADA and to be honored with the title "Madame President."

## The People I Have Met

I am often asked about my travels during this year. How many miles? To which cities, states, countries have I traveled? When I reflect on this, my thoughts aren't about the places I have gone. Rather, I think of the people I have met, the commitment I have witnessed, the heartfelt stories I have heard, the issues and opportunities for education we have discussed together, and my hopes that I have helped to make a difference.

My heart guided me to the mission of the ADA, that is, to make a difference and instill pride in the work and achievements of the organization. One of my goals has been to make a difference in every community across the country by meeting and supporting our leadership councils at every opportunity.

Another focus has been to increase opportunities for primary care providers to add to their knowledge base about diabetes, to enhance their own education and the clinical care and education they provide their patients, while increasing their awareness of the services ADA offers to them.

In addition, I have tried to explain to colleagues and provide myself as a model to illustrate how our association has broadened its audience and continues to reach out to more partners in the United States and abroad to bring its message to all health professionals and to those affected by diabetes. The ADA has expanded its focus to address prevention issues, particularly with regard to prediabetes and the increase in type 2 diabetes among our nation's youth. Our advocacy efforts continue to be instrumental in helping improve health care, fight discrimination, and increase the federal government's commitment to

diabetes research. We've stepped up outreach activities at the community level to reach people with diabetes, their family members and friends, and their health care providers with vital information to improve care. We have continued to form partnerships with other agencies to help our communities prevent disease and achieve healthier lifestyles. Knowledge is indeed power.

One of my overriding communications objectives was to mention my passion and focus on education in every interview and at every presentation. I observed other educators carrying out this objective, as well. It is the educational product or offering that provides the foundation for successful outcomes, and our patients' health is our most desired outcome.

In addition to my efforts to enhance the association's visibility, I made it a priority to work collaboratively and seamlessly with my colleagues and principal officers, James A. Horbowicz and Dr. Eugene J. Barrett, and with our executive committee. We embarked on this journey together, as a team. Independently, we have pursued our own paths, but always toward a common purpose: furthering the work and mission of the ADA.

Those who know me best know that I try always to have fun, to take comfort in my music, to enjoy the magic of each moment, to continuously improve, and most importantly, to do good (or, in other words, to do no harm). I try to live by the words of one of my mentors and esteemed colleagues, Marion Franz, who has been known to say, "Attend to your passion with good humor, and add fun. Then remember to do the work, but cheerfully." To each of you, I offer similar advice: Stay the course, yet have fun in all aspects of your life.

The people I have met include all of you—the health care professionals who celebrate our common passion every day. We revel in the glory of our professions and share in the joy of honoring our colleagues who have participated in leadership for the organization and served as role models for other educators. How can anyone fully acknowledge all of the wonderful people who willingly serve the ADA? Our shared mission is not about any of us individually, but

rather it is about the people in all of the communities that have been touched by the many faces of the ADA as a whole.

I continue to be truly humbled by my experiences within the association. In my weaker moments, I wonder if I can meet all of the challenges and fear that I may one day be revealed as an imposter masquerading as a knowledgeable diabetes educator. But then I realize that it's not about me; it's about our shared passion, energy, and focus on our collective work to serve and to educate. This shared passion drives our success and deeply affects our lives. And, it provides the energy, the synergy, we can draw upon to achieve our mission.

I hope that my journey this year has helped pave the way for the future of the ADA and the places it has yet to go to achieve its mission. A friend of mine once offered me advice she had read that, as we travel through life, we should not seek to arrive at our grave in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, carrying a favorite food and beverage, and loudly proclaiming, "Wow, what a ride!" If the rest of my years are as exciting for me as the past one has been, I will indeed achieve that goal.

### The Things I Have Learned

*Life is not about milestones. It's about moments.*

—Rose Kennedy

This is one of my favorite bits of inspiration. And for the remainder of this article, I would like to share additional words of wisdom that I have found helpful on my journey.

*Do not go where a path might lead you; go instead where there is no path, and leave a trail.*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

*I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use to be anything else."*

—Sir Winton Churchill

It occurred to me a few years ago that when I am comfortably and quietly going about my business as usual, perhaps I may need to review my path,

re-energize my thoughts and actions, check to see if I am missing anything. It is in such moments that I remember these wisdoms, and renew my efforts.

*When you see a void, jump in.*

—Marion Franz

*Take the time and energy to do the less comfortable approach. The rewards outweigh the process. The important thing in life is not the triumph, but the struggle!*

—Pierre de Coubertin

*If you find a fork in the road, take it.*

—Yogi Berra

Heeding the advice in the three quotes above has afforded me many opportunities that I may not otherwise have had. The most important fork in my road? My service within the ADA, of course!

*Where do we go from here?*

—Alice, in "Alice in Wonderland"

*Depends on where you want to get to.*

—The Cheshire Cat, in "Alice in Wonderland"

As an ADA volunteer and leader, I advise you all to go forward with purpose and look for the voids. Focus on education, advocacy, and research efforts throughout our nation and in your practice. Give your energy and time to prevention, empowerment, cure, care, and commitment. Take the leap. Take the high road. Extend yourself to embrace the needs of your communities and your patients and your own passions. And focus your efforts by volunteering with the ADA. I assure you, the rewards and benefits are many.

*You're off to great places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So . . . get on your way!*

—Dr. Seuss

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