Good Reading for Various Ages


Dr Clif Cleaveland’s office in Chattanooga, like the cover and title page of his memoir, Sacred Space, is decorated by a print of “The Doctor” by Samuel Luke Fildes. The painting, the original of which hangs in the Tate Gallery in London, shows a bearded doctor dressed in a suit of the late 1800s, hand on chin, watching a sick child who is sleeping, and to judge by the tension in the darkened room — father standing watchfully, mother with head in arms on table — perhaps close to death.

Defining the sacred space of the doctor-patient relationship, Cleaveland writes: “At the bedside of the war, curly haired child sits a physician, whose eyes and attention are riveted upon his young patient. . . . He senses the ebbing of the child’s life. We sense that he has sat by this bedside for the entire night.”

You would be making a mistake if you said at this point, “Ah yes, Dr Kildare”, and stopped reading. Cleaveland, however stiffly he sometimes expresses the philosophy of his medical practice, illustrates throughout the book the value that he places on both service and relationship to his patients. He needs none of the au courant protocols to teach him how to sit and hand over a tissue when a patient begins to cry, or how to manage his relationship to his patients. He needs none of the notes are around somewhere”. One such patient was Sally, whose perforated colon was treated with surgery and this means that we must create between our patients and us an unhurried climate of trust and respect.”

About the scientific facts he learned during his rotation on the Vanderbilt hematology service, “the notes are around somewhere”. The real lesson of that service “had to do with style . . . with the persistent and unflinching awareness of a shared humanity, which finally dissolves all barriers when speaking and listening to one another.” Cleaveland’s career was interrupted for 2 years by his Army service, years of the Vietnam war with its antiwar protests and societal upheaval from which the military seemed quite insulated. Although he felt that “we lived within a small police state”, his 3 sons rejoiced because they thought they had moved to a “theme park” where they could play with tanks in the museum and watch helicopters take off and land.

His sole medical triumph in the Army, he reports, was the curing of the infertility of a young couple who were making love 3 times a day, obviously overtaxing the husband’s capacity. Advised to do it only 3 times a week, the wife became pregnant.

Cleaveland’s practice in Chattanooga is populated by patients who can and who cannot pay. Regardless, he seems interested in the person, the symptoms, the treatment. There is Alicia, who had intractable headaches and hypertension and gradually told him about her chaotic life. “Either her headaches diminished over the years or we reached a truce in our effort to control the pain.” And Lena, a Holocaust victim, who was his patient for 16 years. One of the things she taught him, he writes, is that “we physicians do not take medical histories so much as we receive them, and this means that we must create between our patients and us an unhurried climate of trust and respect.”

It would be a mistake to think of him (forget Kildare) as Dr Feelgood. Cleaveland served a fellowship in clinical pharmacology at Vanderbilt, and although he stresses the interactive aspects of the doctor-patient dyad, his treatment is governed by science as well as art. Curiously, as he gets on with the stories the writing becomes more fluid and the histories engaging. The philosophy of managed care, with its little boxes of time and dollars, takes a hit. Sacred Space is a proud manifesto of the profession.

Dr O Thomas Feagin writes in the foreword that he would choose Clif Cleaveland “in a flash to take care of me and mine”. So would I.

Lore Feldman

Lore Feldman has been writing and editing for nonprofit institutions for more than 30 years. She lives in Houston with her husband, 2 of her 3 children, 4 of her 5 grandchildren, and her dog, Ouisie. She has edited 11 books, but this is her first book review.
Book Notes


Do you want to intrigue your kids, your nieces and nephews, your grandchildren with science? Combine it with the study of disaster in this free-wheeling, interactive adventure from the producers of the Klutz books. See a Jeep racing a 1000°F cloud of volcanic ash. Learn how to make a volcano yourself. Want to make a volcano? You’ve got it: “Start with a cardboard tube. The best kind are oatmeal containers. Get rid of the oatmeal somehow.”

Curious about tornadoes? Learn how it would feel to stare into one. Heard about trees impaled by forks and boards hurled by these whirling demons? See pictures of these very objects. You can make hurricanes, too, by exercising the “broken straw slobber effect”. And measure the impact of earthquakes by an informal “grocery store mess”.

There’s more. Avalanches (send your own photo of peas piled high to prove that you can do better than the Klutz guys), slumps and sinkholes, floods, tidal waves (4 men temporarily disappear under the water of a rogue wave), and explosions.

The book takes a page from the Internet. You can start it anywhere and get good stuff. It’s interactive, asking the reader to send in photos or tell stories for later publication. There are simulated hypertext links, in which one photo is tipped in on top of another.

I can’t speak strongly enough for this book, because it so effectively combines fun with real science. I have emphasized the analogies in this review, but the scientific basis is described too. Buy it for yourself if you don’t have a child for it.

Walter Pagel


As he did for the mammals in his earlier work Beast Feast, in Insectlopedia Douglas Florian has produced a sprightly, rhythmic guide, this one to the insects. Intended for the young but engaging the old, Florian’s poems and illustrations bring home the everyday lives of insects, from the dragonfly to the mayfly, from inchworms to termites. He uses typographic topography when it suits, as in the spiral poem for the whirligig beetles and the looped poem for the inchworm. The termite poem is mounded up, and the army ants advance in a barked-out cadence. You can have fun reading these poems to your young friends and enjoy knowing that they are learning something about the natural world. Perhaps what you know could be thrown into the pot too.

Walter Pagel


Seeking a gift for the children of a friend, I encountered a picture book titled What Do Authors Do? Given CBE’s current examination of authorship issues, I found the question familiar. This book, however, addresses it in a different sense: It offers children (and adults who still enjoy children’s books) an informative and enjoyable introduction to how a book becomes a book.

This fictional but largely realistic work traces 2 books for children from concept through marketing. Readers see how the authors develop their ideas, seek publishers, work with editors and designers, help publicize their books and then come up with topics for their next books. The book provides insight into both the mechanics and the psychology of writing a book. For example, in one part an editor says to one of the authors, “the ending is confusing . . . a different word here” (the author thinks, “Groan! A lot more work to do!”); meanwhile, another editor tells the other author, “this is a terrific book! But I think chapter one needs more work” (the latter author likewise thinks “Groan! More work!”).

Like the text, the illustrations both inform and entertain. One set of drawings lucidly summarizes the printing process. Another, on writer’s block, shows one author playing tic-tac-toe and the other taking a bubble bath. Throughout, drawings of the authors’ expressive pets reinforce the mood and add to the humor.

Yes, I bought the book for the children of my friend. I have since ordered copies for young relatives and others. This book offers us in writing, editing, and publishing a fine way to introduce children to what we do. And at $4.95, it is affordable even on incomes in our fields.

Barbara Gastel