

Walter Pagel, ELS

Interview #21

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Walter Pagel, ELS

Interview #21

Interview Profile

Interview Information:

Two interview sessions: 1 August 2012, 10 August 2012
Total approximate duration: 3 hours 40 minutes
Interviewer: Tacey A. Rosolowski, Ph.D.

For a CV, biosketch, and other support materials, contact:

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About the Interview Subject:

Walter Pagel (b. December 18, 1947, West Point, New York) joined MD Anderson as an Assistant Editor of Scientific Publication in 1971. Since 1984 he has served as Director of the Department of Scientific Publications. His philosophy of scientific writing has shaped the Department's editorial and teaching services provided to MD Anderson faculty. Mr. Pagel has been a member of the Council of Biology Editors for twenty-two years. While serving on the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences, he had nationwide impact by helping to develop accreditation guidelines for editors in the biomedical sciences. In 2001 he received the John P. McGovern Award for Excellence in Biomedical Communication.

Major Topics Covered:

Personal and educational background

The craft of the scientific editor

A reader-centered philosophy of editing

Department of Scientific Publications: history, role of, services for faculty and institution

MD Anderson publications (e.g. *The Heart Bulletin*, *The Year Book of Cancer*, *Cancer Bulletin*, *Breast Diseases*, *Neuro-oncology*, *The First Twenty Years*, the *Cancer Care Series*)

Electronic publishing

Work with national biomedical editing organizations

**University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center
Making Cancer History Voices® Oral History Project**

Research Medical Library: Historical Resources Center

Original Interview Profile: Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

Submitted by: Tacey A. Rosolowski, Ph.D.

Date Revised: 9 10 June 2014

In this two-session interview (approx. 3:40), Mr. Walter Pagel (b. December 18, 1947, West Point, New York) talks about his forty-one year career in the Department of Scientific Publications at MD Anderson. His roles have spanned editing, teaching, and administration. He has served as the Department's director since 1984, and his philosophy of scientific writing has shaped the Department's editorial and teaching services provided to MD Anderson faculty. The interview sessions take place in Mr. Pagel's office in Pickens Tower on the main MD Anderson Campus. Tacey A. Rosolowski, Ph.D. is the interviewer.

Mr. Pagel joined MD Anderson as an Assistant Editor in 1971, after graduating from Rice University with a B.A. in English and a minor in Biology. He left MD Anderson briefly in 1974 to serve as Associate Editor for the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals in Chicago, Illinois. He returned to MD Anderson in 1976 as an Associate Editor and was promoted to Publications Coordinator in 1978. Since 1984 he has served as Director. Mr. Pagel has been a member of the Council of Biology Editors for twenty-two years. While serving on the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences, he had nationwide impact by helping to develop accreditation guidelines for editors in the biomedical sciences. In 2001 he received the John P. McGovern Award for Excellence in Biomedical Communication.

In this interview, Mr. Pagel shines a light into the world of scientific publishing and the importance of written communication for the success of scientific researchers. He explains the wide range of services that the Department of Scientific Publications offers to MD Anderson. He explains the evolution of his own, reader-oriented philosophy of scientific writing and traces the initiatives he undertook to offer MD Anderson faculty new skills and strategies for success in publishing and writing for grants. He sketches a history of the Department of Scientific Publications and describes how scientific publishing has changed as electronic technologies and the Internet have altered access to information. Mr. Pagel also offers insight into the roles of an institutional publication service and the challenges arising from the broader political and economic context of the institution. He discusses the range of publications his Department has produced over the years (e.g. *The Heart Bulletin*, *The Year Book of Cancer*, *Cancer Bulletin*, *Breast Diseases*, *Neuro-oncology*, *The First Twenty Years*) including one of his own initiatives, the *Cancer Care Series*.

Walter Pagel, ELS

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Interview #21

Segment Summaries

Interview Session One: 1 August 2012

Segment 00A
Interview Identifier

Segment 01
The Role of the Department of Scientific Publications and Its Editors
B: Overview

Story Codes
A: Overview
A: Definitions, Explanations, Translations
B: MD Anderson Snapshot
C: Professional Practice
C: The Professional at Work
D: On Research and Researchers

Mr. Pagel explains that the Department of Scientific Publications supports faculty in the writing of research articles. This role is key because the reputation of an institution is built on the reputation of its faculty who advance their public stature entirely by publication. Scientific Publications is also responsible for a number of institutional publications, including *Cancer Bulletin* and *Onco-Log*, an online newsletter for physicians in private practice. In addition, the Department provides writing programs for faculty and students. Mr. Pagel notes that the Department has a good reputation among the graduate students, who go on to successful careers in part facilitated by their ability to write and publish.

Mr. Pagel defines the purpose of a research article: to disseminate discoveries to peers and those outside a specialty. In his view, an editor's main role is to help researchers understand the important of providing the context in which a discovery emerges –and to which it contributes. Many are not aware of such background and it is needed so that articles have meaning to audiences beyond a researcher's specific field. He notes that sloppy writing often suggests sloppy science, so an editor helps a researcher achieve clear and accurate writing. Editors in the Department of Scientific Publications work primarily on articles. Most books are already under contract with a publisher (who handles editorial work), though they do support faculty who are exploring publications avenues for books. He also notes that though faculty at MD Anderson contribute chapters to books (and Scientific Publications provides editorial support), these matter much less than articles to the evolution of a faculty member's career. A great scientific article, he explains, tells a story that situates a discovery in the history of a field and also gives a real sense of a scientist involved in a research process that leads to the unveiling of an important answer to a scientific question. He has worked with some great writers at MD

Anderson, among them Drs. Isaiah J. Fidler [Oral History Interview], Lester Peter, and Margaret Kripke [Oral History Interview].

Segment 02

Learning the Editor's Craft

A: Professional Path

Story Codes

A: Joining MD Anderson

A: Professional Path

C: Evolution of Career

B: Institutional Processes

C: Professional Practice

C: The Professional at Work

Mr. Pagel begins this segment by quickly sketching his educational path, including his track at Rice University, where he first majored in electrical engineering, then switched to English Literature. A career counselor at Rice suggested he apply for an opening in Scientific Publications at MD Anderson, and in 1971 he became an assistant editor. He describes his activities at that time and notes that he began to learn what it meant to be an editor. There were 6-8 editors in the department at the time, handling about ten articles per month.

Next Mr. Pagel explains that he left MD Anderson in 1974 to become Assistant Managing Editor (then Associate Editor, 1975) for the *Quality Review Bulletin* published by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals in Chicago, Illinois. The Bulletin published narratives of care provided at institutions; frequently review of the details provided would indicate need for a further audit of the institution prior to its accreditation. Mr. Pagel point out that the Joint Commission came to understand that more than physician notes are needed to assess the quality of care.

Segment 03

The History of the Department of Scientific Publications

B: An Institutional Unit

Story Codes

B: MD Anderson History

B: MD Anderson Snapshot

C: Leadership

C: Mentoring

B: Critical Perspectives on MD Anderson

In this segment, Mr. Pagel explains that he returned to MD Anderson's Department of Scientific Publications as an Associate Editor in 1976. He notes that he had the reputation of working well with faculty. He managed several projects in his new role, including the *Research Report* and the *General Report*.

He then briefly sketches the history of the Department of Scientific Publications, created by R. Lee Clark to provide centralized editorial services on the model of the Mayo Clinic's in-house services, founded at the end of the 19th or the beginning of the 20th century. Mr. Pagel also

recounts how Dr. Russell Cumley came to be the first chair of the Department because of a personal connection with Dr. Clark. Dr. Cumley influenced Mr. Pagel's leadership style by showing respect for his staff's abilities.

Mr. Pagel next provides an overview of the people and projects in Scientific Publications. He begins by characterizing his leadership style as more collaborative than authoritarian, a style he learned from Dorothy Beane (the former director), for example, while Melissa Burkett (Associate Director) has taught him how to plan. (He mentions in passing that the Administrative leadership at MD Anderson tends to "admire its own decisiveness" rather than relying on collaboration to make decisions.)

Segment 04

Developing a New Editorial Perspective for Scientific Publications

A: The Administrator

Story Codes

B: Institutional Processes

A: Definitions, Explanations, Translations

B: Building/Transforming the Institution

C: Professional Practice

C: The Professional at Work

Mr. Pagel begins this segment by speaking briefly about some changes he tried to make to the *General Report*. He then covers two main policy changes he instituted during his role as Publications Coordinator ('78 – '84) and Director ('84 – present). The first was to regularize the pace of editing manuscripts, previously determined by the editorial staff. He worked with staff to reorganize this process so editing could be done more quickly and efficiently. Mr. Pagel speaks briefly with the Interviewer about how editors specialize in different subject areas, but the challenges of editing scientific papers come down to a core set of basic issues. He then explains that prior to the 90s, faculty were required to submit manuscripts to Scientific Publications for editing help (whether they wanted/needed it or not). During the 90s, however, Scientific Publications was inundated with article manuscripts as well as grant proposals, and they switched from a mandatory to voluntary system to better serve those who actually wanted help. Mr. Pagel also talks about the challenges of marketing the services Scientific Publications offers within MD Anderson. One challenge, he points out, is that even though journals provide very poor editing services, researchers often question whether non-scientists (i.e, the editors in Scientific Publications) can truly help them with their articles.

Segment 05

A Reader-Focused Philosophy: Editing and Teaching

B: An Institutional Unit

Story Codes

B: Institutional Processes

A: Definitions, Explanations, Translations

B: Building/Transforming the Institution

C: Professional Practice

C: The Professional at Work

In this segment Mr. Pagel talks about how the Department's approach to editing crystallized under his Directorship. The focus shifted from copyediting as the main task to determining what an article must provide to meet the expectations of a *reader* (who might not necessarily be a peer within a scientist's own narrow specialty). The 2000s were a key period in which Scientific Publications began to develop in-house guidelines for structuring a reader-focused article at the same time that they developed focus groups and writing courses (at first to serve the rising numbers of international scientists at the institution). They concluded that they could teach a conventional framework for assembling an article that would communicate effectively. Over a six month period, they set up classes (with a workbook) to demonstrate how to put together an article with a logical sequence of parts, with guidance regarding the contents of each section. Mr. Pagel talks about how important it is for international scientists to be able to participate in "the discourse that drives science." He also observes that as Scientific Publications taught the writing courses, their experiences fed back and influenced their ability to edit articles effectively.

Segment 06

Key In-House Publications

B: Building the Institution

Story Codes

B: Institutional Processes

A: Definitions, Explanations, Translations

B: Building/Transforming the Institution

C: Professional Practice

C: The Professional at Work

C: Discovery and Success

C: Discovery, Creativity and Innovation

Here Mr. Pagel talks about several key activities in the Department. First he notes the move, in the 1980s, to a new building and then the shift from an MBI computer to Mac personal computers. He then talks about the key publications the Department produces. The *Year Book of Cancer* '56 – '88), provided a collection of abstracts of cancer research and was, effectively, a database before the days of electronic databasing. Mr. Pagel himself started the *Cancer Care Series*, created as a holistic picture of MD Anderson research treating particular care sites. In 1990, Mr. Pagel began talking to clinical leaders about the series, and realized he needed a champion. Dr. Ralph Freedman emerged, offering the idea that the project could be funded by the Alumni Association. Scientific Publications has published "Breast Cancer," "Gastrointestinal Cancer," "Gynecologic Cancer," "Lung Cancer," "Pediatric Oncology," and "Tumors of the Brain and Spine." Each is a comprehensive work, heavily edited, he points out, as it is designed to inform non-academic physicians about the latest research. Also planned are volumes on bone sarcoma, head and neck, emergency oncology medicine, and survivorship. Mr. Pagel questions how effectively these books are being marketed. Next he talks about the OncoLog newsletter, first published in '56. It is now offered in print and as an online publication for non-academic physicians, in both English and Spanish.

Interview Session Two: 10 August 2012

Segment 00B

Interview Identifier

Segment 07

Reports, Changes to the Field of Scientific Publications, and the Challenges of In-House Publications

B: An Institutional Unit

Story Codes

B: Institutional Processes

A: Definitions, Explanations, Translations

B: Building/Transforming the Institution

C: Professional Practice

C: The Professional at Work

C: Discovery and Success

In this segment Mr. Pagel first talks about how MD Anderson was selected by the Texas Department of Health to prepare reports on “The Impact of Cancer on Texas.” This came about through the efforts of Dr. Joseph Painter and the Texas Commissioner of Health. The Department of Scientific Publications prepared three editions of this report between 1977 and the mid-eighties, compiling information on the impact of cancer by disease site. The statistics, he explains, came from ordinary databases. When data management changed (becoming primarily electronic) the publication was stopped.

Next, Mr. Pagel describes how publishing in the sciences has been radically altered in the electronic age, when information is so accessible and the pace of research is so brisk. Books are becoming much less prominent in the biomedical field, he explains, as there is no point in compiling information in a book when the contents will be quickly outdated. This accessibility offers mixed benefits, however, as Mr. Pagel notes. Fewer and fewer individuals browse for information, and he sees this as an indication that researchers tend not to look beyond the limits of information they know they need, a habit that may ultimately narrow their perspective. He gives examples of researchers who take a different perspective and always think about what is going on outside their own field of research: Molecular biologist Arnold J. Levine, who discovered p53, the tumor suppressor gene, and Gigi (Guillermina) Lozano, Ph.D., Professor and Chair of the Department of Cancer Genetics at MD Anderson, who also studies the gene. Dr. Lozano has established herself with great publication and the reach of her grants, he explains, and she has served on panel discussions organized by Scientific Publications. The advice she gave at one session: Don’t expect your funding to be renewed if your work has not evolved by year five.

Mr. Pagel next goes into detail about the Department’s (ultimately unsuccessful) experience with a journal publishing initiative. *Molecular Carcinogenesis* was first published in 1988, and Mr. Pagel notes the individuals involved in starting up the journal, with the rationale that creating such a publication would facilitate connections with faculty. However, this publication would have to support itself financially, and the Department of Scientific Publications realized that it could not manage a successful journal under those conditions. After publishing one issue, the journal was turned over to Wiley-Liss publishers. Mr. Pagel then talks about *Cancer Bulletin*, the journal once most closely associated with MD Anderson, broadening his focus to comment on the politics of publication and the questionable value of institutional journals, given the current availability of information. He then talks about the challenges of working on MD Anderson’s “General Report” (which served as a kind of annual report until about 1990.) From

an editorial perspective, it was a challenging publication because there were no guidelines for contributors to follow. From another perspective, it was a challenge because no one had defined a clear purpose or audience for the Report. Mr. Pagel notes that it was important to MD Anderson in earlier years to document the caliber of the institution. After 1990, the Department of Public Affairs took over publication of an "Annual Report," with the function of reporting taxpayer money is spent.

Segment 08

Offering Support for MD Anderson Writers

B: An Institutional Unit

Story Codes

B: Institutional Processes

B: Building/Transforming the Institution

C: Professional Practice

C: The Professional at Work

Mr. Pagel begins this segment reviewing how the Department of Scientific Publications offers editorial and instructional writing support to MD Anderson faculty. He then talks about *Words into Print*, a book of guidelines for writers published in-house that has evolved through three editions (1983, 1992, 2000). He notes that the Department has learned more with each edition published and expects that it will go through another, two-volume edition in which writing skills and writing process are treated separately. He then summarizes the mission of the Department's courses: to teach a systematic way of writing an article that satisfies the conventions of a field and meets reader expectations. The practice of teaching how to accomplish this has evolved slowly, but had never altered the basic philosophy established years ago. Mr. Pagel then talks about funding for the Department's writing courses. He underscores that the courses are a source of great pride for the Department, and that they have worked hard to earn a reputation among a community of researchers who might never believe that a nonscientist could have credibility and authority to aid them in publishing their work.

Segment 09

Strengthening Biomedical Editing Nationwide and Within MD Anderson

A: Contributions

Story Codes

B: Building/Transforming the Institution

A: The Administrator

A: The Educator

A: Activities Outside Institution

A: Career and Accomplishments

B: Institutional Processes

In this segment, first briefly notes his involvement with the Southwest Chapter of the American Medical Writer's Association and the Council of Biology Editors (with a 22-year membership). He then explains that he had his biggest impact while he served on the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences and in the late 80s worked on the Editorial Certification Examination Development Committee. He describes the examination he helped create to certify competence for editors of biomedical articles and explains the significance of certification. He notes that the Department

of Scientific Publications at MD Anderson uses its own battery of tests to evaluate editors' abilities for abstract reasoning, grammar, and other skills and talents.

Next, Mr. Pagel talks about his Department's blog, "The Write Stuff," and two significant projects: his role on the Historical Resources Center Steering Committee, and the development of panel discussions for the Department of Scientific Publications. To begin the discussion of the Steering Committee, he notes that Scientific Publications wrote *The First Twenty Years*, the first history of MD Anderson. Because of this association with the institution's history, Mr. Pagel was asked to be part of the Steering Committee when the Historical Resources Center was formed and set as its first goal the publication of an updated institutional history. Mr. Pagel wanted the perspective to be broader than the first book, situating MD Anderson and cancer research in a larger context of other cancer institutions and the history of cancer research. Though not alone in holding this view, he says he had something to do with articulating it for the benefit of the Steering Committee. He describes how James Olsen was selected to be the author and notes other Steering Committee activities.

Segment 10

Initiatives and Committees

A: The Administrator

Story Codes

B: Building/Transforming the Institution

D: On Research and Researchers

A: The Administrator

A: The Educator

A: Activities Outside Institution

A: Career and Accomplishments

B: Institutional Processes

In this segment, Mr. Pagel reviews several past and ongoing activities for the Department of Scientific Publications. He first talks about the series of panel discussions he established, covering such topics as "Publishing Strategies," "Grant Strategies," and a new panel on "Publishing in High-Impact Journals." In explaining the latter project, Mr. Pagel explains the prevailing assumption that unless a researcher is publishing in high-impact journals, s/he is not successful. Faculty members approached Scientific Publications to address this issue and point out that it is actually a myth—that publication is actually about the quality of science and the writing. He notes there was faculty hostility to the approach Scientific Publications chose to take: to acknowledge that the importance of high-impact journals is simply a reality and that researchers need to learn the skills required to reach these journals. He mentions several people he has invited to speak on this panel, noting that everyone was very willing to participate.

Mr. Pagel next mentions that he must complete his work on the *Cancer Care Series* prior to his retirement, then he goes on to talk about his work on a committee formed to change the Research Report into an online publication. He explains the strategy of creating general guidelines then inviting faculty to decide the details of the procedure, and notes how proud he was of the committee's effectiveness. After noting a habit of MD Anderson's administration to impose plans from the top-down, he explains how the online report came to be incorporated into a database.

Segment 11

Presidents and a Senior Vice President

B: Key MD Anderson Figures

Story Codes

C: Portraits

A: Critical Perspectives

C: Professional Practice

C: The Professional at Work

C: Collaborations

C: Leadership

C: Giving Recognition

C: Critical Perspectives

In this overview of key MD Anderson administrators, Mr. Pagel first describes R. Lee Clark as a powerful individual who recognized everyone in the institution personally –and who was also feared. Mr. Pagel explains that Dr. Clark was very concerned about his centrality to the institution and would evaluate others' actions based on how they influenced his position. Dr. Charles LeMaistre, he says, was very supportive of Scientific Publications and had a habit of allowing good people to lead themselves. He says that while Dr. Clark's leadership was based on charisma, Dr. LeMaistre may have had more affection for MD Anderson people. He describes Dr. John Mendelsohn taught the institution how to be successful in an aggressive way, turning MD Anderson into a business. His style was to "float above everyone else," Mr. Pagel says. Mr. Pagel describes the warm welcome he received when going to meet Dr. Ronald DePinho, the institution's fourth president, and speculates the scientific writing may be personally very important to Dr. DePinho, who quickly sent the Department articles to edit and was quick to praise the results. Mr. Pagel then describes Dr. Stephen Tomasovic, with whom he worked for fifteen years. He recalls that it was Dr. Tomasovic who challenged him to "do something" and succeed in the area of education, when it was clear that writing needed to be addressed in the institution. He states that Dr. Tomasovic "gave everything he could to this institution."

Segment 12

Paying Attention: A Professional and Personal Habit

A: Post-Retirement Activities

Story Codes

C: Portraits

C: Discovery, Creativity and Innovation

C: Faith, Values, Beliefs

A: Activities Outside Institution

A: Career and Accomplishments

A: Post Retirement Activities

A: Professional Values, Ethics, Purpose

A: Character, Values, Beliefs, Talents

A: Personal Background

C: Professional Practice

In this segment, Mr. Pagel first talks about receiving the John P. McGovern Award for Excellence in Biomedical Communication in 2001. He then looks ahead to activities he will take up after retiring at the end of August 2012. He likes to cook and tend orchids and he also writes, he notes. He is a good amateur photographer and may volunteer for the Houston Public Library's new photography project. He lists some of the authors he respects (e.g. Ernest Hemmingway and Vladimir Nabokov). Observing his own character he says, "I notice that there are people who don't notice anything," whereas he feels his is attuned to what's going on around him. This, he says, is the reason he likes to cook, enjoy wine, and keep orchids. He mentions that he recently received a call from Chapin Rodriguez, Director of Scientific Training at the Association for Multimedia Education (UMNA) in China, who asked him, "How do you *do* this?" Mr. Pagel says, "What I do is fairly simple, but moderately unusual: I ask questions and pay attention to the answers."

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

Interview Session 1— August 1, 2012

About transcription and the transcript

This interview had been transcribed according to oral history best practices to preserve the conversational quality of spoken language (rather than editing it to written standards).

The interview subject has been given the opportunity to review the transcript and make changes: any substantial departures from the audio file are indicated with brackets [].

In addition, the Archives may have redacted portions of the transcript and audio file in compliance with HIPAA and/or interview subject requests.

Chapter 00A

Interview Identifier

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:00.6

And I always make sure I see the counter doing its thing. I'm Tacey Ann Rosolowski interviewing Mr. Walter Pagel, Director of the Department of Scientific Publications at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas. This interview is being conducted for The Making Cancer History Voices Oral History Project run by the Historical Resources Center at MD Anderson, and the interview is taking place in Mr. Pagel's office in the Pickens Academic Tower on the main campus of MD Anderson. This is the first of perhaps two planned interview sessions. You're shaking your head. One, one, one. Okay. Today is August 1, 2012, and the time is ten minutes after two o'clock, and thank you so much for giving your time to the project.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:00:46.2

Glad to be here. I hope you find something.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:47.9

Okay. I hope so, too. I'm sure I will. I mean, as a writer myself, I'm interested in what you have to say.

Interview Session: 01
Interview: August 1, 2012

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:00:55.0

Okay.

Interview Session: 01
Interview: August 1, 2012

Chapter 01

B: Overview

The Role of the Department of Scientific Publications and Its Editors

Story Codes

- A: Overview
- A: Definitions, Explanations, Translations
- B: MD Anderson Snapshot
- C: Professional Practice
- C: The Professional at Work
- D: On Research and Researchers

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:55.2

So, you know you have one eager listener. I wanted to start out, as I mentioned earlier, with some general questions and then go to the more chronological treatment of your career. I wanted to start with the question of what role you feel the Department of Scientific Publications serves here at MD Anderson—not only for the individuals who come for various kinds of support with manuscripts but also for the institution as a whole?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:01:22.7

My theory—I believe it to be true for any academic institution—which is that the success of its academicians is the success of the university. The institutional reputation is built—this one is built on its cancer-care outcome, yes. But it's also built on the reputation of its faculty and the discoveries they make which are nothing until they're published somewhere. That's fundamentally how we contribute to the institution. Other ways that we contribute—we have been, as I've mentioned earlier, responsible for the institutional publishing—and that's included important reports over the generations practically since the day this place was founded. [*The Cancer Bulletin*](#) for most of its existence, *The MD Anderson OncoLog* is its physician newsletter—well anyway, as the institutional publishers of things that a publisher wouldn't publish but an institution needs to have out there—or used to need to have out there.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:02:30.9

What's that difference between what a publisher would publish and what an institution publishes?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:02:35.5

A publisher needs to sell their stuff. We don't need to sell it. We just want people to read it.

Interview Session: 01

Interview: August 1, 2012

That's essentially it. And then finally we—since we introduced a writing education program, I believe—and the people who run, for example, the postdoctoral office would agree with me—that our program has an effect on what kind of students are interested in coming here—what kind of trainee, what kind of postdocs. The demand for this training is very high and contributes to the kind of students that the institution gets as well as to the success of those trainees. The trainees in the long run probably—well, that's not true. I was going to say they don't have that much effect on the institution, but the truth is that every great academician in this place names what's happened to its best—his or her best students, so yes, that too.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:03:33.0

It's all part of—I mean I like the phrase that Michael Ahearn [MD [Oral History Interview]] used—the pipeline. And it sounds like you're very much part of that. And I hadn't anticipated what you said—that the writing program actually helps you attract students not only create stronger—

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:03:49.0

Well, you know, that's a theory. I don't—there's no surveys of the students of that, but it has a reputation now among the students who are here, and there has to be conversation between students that are already—trainees who are here—these are postdocs mainly—and trainees in the home countries. We're speaking mainly of Asians, of course. There has to be an underground conversation about that that makes this program better and more attractive, I should say. And there's probably ways to prove that, but we haven't bothered with that one.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:04:31.2

The second question I wanted to ask you is basically about the editor's role in working with an author. How do you see your role as you work with someone who's preparing a scientific manuscript—either an article or a book?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:04:49.5

Those are two very different things. An article is almost inevitably about a discovery that the person has made. That person wants that discovery to be known. The person wants that discovery to be known by the people that matter to them—their peers primarily, but even beyond that sometimes. Those who have made what they hope is a really important discovery want the context of that discovery—the importance of the context of the discovery to broader audiences to be clear. I think I'm losing track of what I'm talking about here.

Interview Session: 01
Interview: August 1, 2012

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:05:28.4

What was the issue with context? I'm interested that you brought that in.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:05:32.5

It is—I would call it a weakness. It might just be a standard attitude of scientists which is that if you talk about—I have to think how to say this. They tend to overlook the importance of context for their discoveries and rely on only their closest peers' understanding that this discovery is a key step on the way to something all their peers wanted. But what they don't think about very much when they want a wider audience to see it is that you can't count on those readers to know that context, and you need to establish it. So if you want to be published in science—at least in theory—you need to say what field you're putting this kind of specificity on and what the unknowns are in a way that appeals to more than just your closest colleagues. A lot of people tend to kind of write for their lab mates, and it doesn't work very well if you want to be published in something other than a second-tier journal. I had one other —

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:06:50.3

What about the book—oh, I'm sorry.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:06:52.8

No, I think—well sloppily written stuff is thought to be representative of sloppy science. Many people say that—not just us, including scientists. So care with the English language does matter. I don't mean that it needs to be brilliant or necessarily even eloquent, but it needs to be accurate and correct. It would also be—might not be a surprise to you that people—because manuscripts are basically pieces of things joined together—that often the pieces have contradictions between them, and it's up to editors to find them. One of their jobs is to find those contradictions and point them out to the author to help him find them and then fix them. Could you remind me of what the question is because I think I've gotten far afield?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:07:59.5

No, you haven't really. I just—you were talking about the work of the editor vis-à-vis an article, and I'm wondering how it's different with a book.

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:08:08.0

With a book—so first of all, people don't write books in science. They write chapters in books or they edit books. I shouldn't say people don't, but as a rule I don't know of anyone here who's actually written a book. There are two ways to be part of a book, and one is to write a chapter for a book or two or three and the other is to be the academic editor of the book who sometimes their only role is to get their peers or colleagues who know the subject area to write a chapter on it, and sometimes it is actually to make sure that the chapters fit together. And they're almost inevitably—not always, but almost invariably their books are already under contract to a publisher. So, speculative books practically don't exist. Anybody who writes one—I've discouraged them strongly because you run a big risk you're wasting a lot of people's time, and I'm not sure you could get people to contribute to a book that doesn't have a publisher already signed. We do work with people in the publishing process as well as editing their books, although I will say that because our other roles have expanded so much our role in books—our willingness to take on book projects is much less than it used to be. Not that we don't love books. We love books. We love the chance to see a whole field or a whole area the way you do with a book, and my own association with individual faculty members has been strongly affected by those who I've worked with who were editors of books.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:10:00.8

The publishing industry has changed enormously.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:10:04.4

It has and the—not only that but the importance of book chapters to the careers of the academicians here is much diminished, so these are scientists and clinicians that are not literature professors or the sorts of people whose careers are very clearly advanced by books. They are people whose careers are advanced by discoveries, which means journal publication.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:10:35.2

The third question I wanted to ask you is what's your take on really great scientific writing? What makes it? Is there an art of really good scientific writing and when do you know it? How do you know it when you see it?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:10:54.2

Obviously I've already said something about context. What to me makes a great scientific article is a story—a story that fits in to other people's stories and a story that feels real when you read it. It feels like a scientist was involved in devising the experiments, was involved in interpreting the experiments, and was involved in saying what the importance of these experiments was and

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relating that importance to other stories that are there in the literature. So my McGovern lecture was basically about that—telling the story of your science and saying things like if you discover something unexpected the best story is that you didn't expect it—what you were hoping to find and what you actually found were different. But it's the inclination of scientists to pretend that they were looking for what they never thought they would see because they want it to be a very clear—I don't know what the reason is. Maybe they want to seem all-knowing or something. There's some reason for them to do that. The other is to leave out context as I said, and to not say enough about what came before them in a way that is at all interesting. When people say what came before them in an interesting way and manage to get you to think that important questions about science are about to be unveiled—or important answers about science are about to be unveiled because these questions have been holding us back, or there are lots of people involved in working on these questions, or these questions affect the health of millions of people, or anything like that. And I don't mean a first sentence that says breast cancer is a deadly disease. I mean something far more specific. So, that's what I think makes—that's a lot to say. I can't give you one phrase for what makes a great thing except a story. A story that—that's all. That's good enough.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:13:10.5

Who would you—what names would you put out as really great writers who you admire in the sciences?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:13:19.5

In the sciences I admired someone who's not here anymore—Lester Peters. I admire Josh Fidler [Isaiah Joshua Fidler, DVM [Oral History Interview]], who is brilliant at context. I admire Margaret Kripke [Ph.D. [Oral History Interview]], who was just brilliant at writing. Those are the three that stand out for me. I hope I'm not leaving anybody out. Most of the other people who do really well I think of as doing well because of their science and not because of their brilliant writing. I'm not saying that Margaret Kripke or Josh Fidler or Lester Peters didn't have great science but they just knew how to tell about it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:14:16.8

Well, thanks. I'm sure we'll uncover more details about those subjects as we continue. Is it okay if we switch now to the chronological approach?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:14:28.6

Sure.

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Chapter 02

A: Professional Path

Learning the Editor's Craft

Story Codes

A: Joining MD Anderson
A: Professional Path
C: Evolution of Career
B: Institutional Processes
C: Professional Practice
C: The Professional at Work

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:14:28.9

Okay. I wanted to start with just basic background questions. Where were you born and when? Where did you grow up?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:14:38.2

I was born in the west—at the United States Military Academy Hospital in West Point, New York. I grew up in Germany and Kansas and Kentucky and Texas and Illinois. I was in Germany twice.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:14:58.2

Wow. Military family. Yep. And you didn't say a year. Do you want to say a year?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:15:06.2

In '47.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:15:08.3

Thank you. When did you come to—I noticed that you— Well, before I ask that, was anyone else in your family involved in either the sciences or in writing?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:15:20.7

Nobody I knew, but there are Pagels who are famous medical historians. They're probably not related to me. Or if they are it's so distantly that I know nothing about them. But if you look up

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Pagel in medical history on Google you would get a bunch of returns—Julius Pagel I think was one of them who wrote a book about medieval medicine, and so on and so forth.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:15:47.2

And you're not enough of a genealogist to want to track that down and see if there's a connection?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:15:51.9

Not so far. I'm retiring because I have lots of stuff I want to do.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:15:55.9

Well, maybe that's one of them.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:15:57.0

My wife is into genealogy, so maybe she'll do it someday.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:00.2

Your wife's name is—?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:16:01.5

Frances [Pagel].

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:01.7

Frances. And in the sciences specifically—were there any practitioners of science specifically?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:16:14.4

No. My mother was a nurse. Does that count?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:17.4

Well yeah. I'm just—there's no right answer. I'm just looking for the context, right?

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:16:20.9

Nope, nope.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:23.5

Where did you get the writing bug and the science bug? How did that all happen?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:16:27.7

I won't say I have a writing bug, but I've got a science bug just because I was good at it—in high school even.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:33.3

Un-hunh (affirmative). How did that start showing itself?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:16:38.5

High school subjects that dismayed other people were easy for me—science and math. I didn't know what the dismay was about until I got to college and found that it could be a lot more complicated.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:54.1

And you went to college—?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:16:55.9

At Rice.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:56.5

At Rice University. And why did you choose to come to Rice?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:17:01.6

I was living in San Antonio. It was a good school. It was public. It was small—probably had something to do with it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:17:14.4

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But I notice that your major was English actually, so how did that happen? Or do I have that wrong?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:17:19.4

No, you don't have it wrong. I started though as a double-E major—electrical engineer. I got all the way through the end of my sophomore year doing that, but my second year physics—second semester, second year physics was relativity and magnetism. There's a close relationship between the two but I never understood it, so I decided I wasn't up for being an electrical engineer. There are many stories like the one I'm about to say. Years later I asked a friend of mine who'd succeeded in engineering. I told him why I'd dropped out, and he said, "Walter, nobody understood that." So. But I'm glad I did what I did. I don't think I would have enjoyed being an engineer. Then I went—actually then I decided to go to medical school so I moved over to biology. By the middle of my junior year I decided I didn't want to work that hard, didn't want to work more, and moved over to English Literature, which I'd always been good in and kept going even when I was taking all of these science and math courses. Somewhat ironically my best friend is a physician who was in class with me, and years later I told him the story—you know—how I didn't want to work that hard, and he said, "Well, I'll tell you what. Medical school was a breeze compared to Rice." What can I say?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:19:07.3

Educational paths and career paths can be quirky-quirky. So you got your degree in '71?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:19:14.6

Right.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:19:15.6

And how did it happen that you came to MD Anderson?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:19:19.0

A career counselor at Rice didn't know what to do with me but did have some connection with MD Anderson—not a connection but a knowledge of this department and sent me over here. And I came three times before they finally interviewed me.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:19:34.7

What do you mean you came here three times?

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:19:36.0

I came here three times applying, and after the third application they interviewed me.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:19:44.1

And what job were you applying for?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:19:46.0

Editor. Assistant editor. I actually interviewed for a job in Public Affairs too, but it was clear I think almost immediately that I was not a public affairs kind of person. I had a very frank interview with the person who was the director at the time—Jane Brandenberger—and we reached agreement that that was not my field.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:20:15.8

Did she have another suggestion? Did she encourage you to go to—?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:20:18.1

She probably encouraged me here but I don't remember well enough.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:20:22.0

So tell me about your interview here and how you ended up getting this job and what you did when you came.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:20:31.7

I don't know exactly why I got the job. Probably because they needed people because there was so much turnover that they couldn't find people that were—I mean—I had a strong science background and a good English Literature background. That should—it seemed to me—qualify me to be an editor. The problem was I did have some difficulty because Rice in those days reported As as ones and Ds as fours, and so finally you could see there was a lot of reluctance on the interviewer's part to say, "Hmm, something's wrong here. What's the trouble here? How come you got such bad grades?"

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:21:15.8

Oh.

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:21:18.2

Fortunately she said that instead of just sending me away with the impression that I had bad grades, so I was able to clarify that. Twos weren't great grades, but they were good enough. What did I do? Stupid work. I cut out clippings from newspapers, typed bibliographies, went to the library to check references with the original sources, wrote a few things for the newsletter—I'm sure they were extremely amateurish—began to learn what it meant to be an editor.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:22:05.2

Who did you report to?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:22:09.5

I think it was somebody named Jill—I don't remember her last name—and she got carried out by the mental health specialist one day.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:22:18.6

Stories. Interesting.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:22:22.9

But the person who had the greatest effect on my knowledge was a woman named Dorothy Beane who ended up being in the—she was my princess of—

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:22:35.0

Tell me about the department when you joined. How large was it? How many editors were on staff? What were the expectations?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:22:41.9

I think there were six or eight editors. I believe we edited approximately ten articles a month. Expectations for me were probably just that I learn not to mess up other people's stuff while still correcting the really bad stuff—bad parts.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:23:04.2

So they—did they give you something to do like a first-pass on and then you handed it on?

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:23:08.4

Uh-hunh (affirmative). Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:23:09.1

Okay. Yeah. When you said you were learning how to be an editor, what were some of the big lessons that you learned in those first couple of years that really stuck?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:23:23.8

I don't know. Truthfully, at that point in my career I was not learning that much except how to be—I was learning to keep my hands off if it didn't need something, and that may be the most that I learned. And I learned something about how to make a long thing shorter. I learned how to use reference books, make sure things were correct. Those are relatively trivial things. That's the way I think of them now.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:24:09.4

Sort of building—just the building blocks.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:24:11.2

Right.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:24:12.3

Right. When did you feel like you made the big switch—when you stopped—you moved beyond the rudimentary stuff and really were beginning to practice your craft?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:24:23.4

I think it's kind of ironic in a sense. I left here after three years and went to work for the Joint Commission in Chicago on a magazine called [*The Quality Review Bulletin*](#). This was a brand-new magazine and a brand-new subject area. And none of the experts—or that is to say the physicians who were doing quality audits—audits of the quality of medical care—knew the first thing about how to write an article. My job was to transform those into something interesting for readers, but for the longest time I didn't realize that. I thought my job was to edit these things, and my job was to respect very much the author's point of view. Well, the author had no decent point of view whatsoever. My job really was not to edit. It was to write something based on what this person thought he was writing, and when I discovered that I—once you start writing yourself

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you begin to realize what it takes—something of what it takes anyway. So that's probably the main place that that happened.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:25:43.5

Tell me more about this project and how it came into being. And why did they tap you to be part of it?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:25:49.7

Which project would that be?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:25:50.7

The Joint Commission project.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:25:52.7

They didn't tap me. I interviewed for it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:25:54.1

You interviewed for it? Okay. Uh-hunh (affirmative).

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:25:55.7

My wife and I decided to go to Chicago and look for a job.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:26:01.2

And that was 1974, 1976?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:26:04.3

Right. Right.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:26:05.1

Okay. Why did you want to leave MD Anderson at that time?

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:26:10.3

Because I disliked my boss deeply. It was a good thing. I'm glad I did it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:26:16.9

Uh-hunh (affirmative). Well, it sounds like you really just kind of made a qualitative leap in the Joint Commission work.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:26:23.5

I didn't know that though. The people who ran it had come from *Playboy*.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:26:30.5

That's amazing. Huh.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:26:33.3

They knew something about how you transform an article into something interesting to people.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:26:39.6

Tell me more about the quality review project. What was its purpose? Why was it established then? Why did they want to do it then?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:26:52.2

I can go way back.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:26:53.3

Was it an ongoing thing or was it a one-off?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:26:57.9

It was ongoing. It was a journal every two months.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:27:00.3

Every two months. Okay.

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:27:01.6

And theoretically it published other people's stories, but as I said mostly it was almost like commissioned works. And then you had to re-do them so that they would sort of fit the mold. And the story is—each story was about—you would take a disease and—not I but the physician experts on the editorial board would imagine what were the features that showed that the care that people who were treated for this got high-quality care, and there would be what they called an audit in which you would pass medical records through a screen—at the time a manual screen. You would just read the article—you would identify what you were looking for, and you would say where you would look for it. You would say then what you expected to see, and if you didn't see it then it would be called an exception. Certain kinds of exceptions indicated really bad care, and sometimes an exception indicated that you needed to ask more questions—not of the people at the institution, at Joint—but of the people who were concerned about the quality of care at their own institutions. And that arose because Joint Commission decided that audit was an essential feature for the accreditation. There have been waves of feelings that there should be audit, and I think that there's another wave going on now, although I'm not sure. Basically because of a series of medical malpractice—big time malpractice suits in which it became clear that you could not rely on the physician notes to know whether the person got the kind of care they deserved. The Joint said, "We need you to look at more records, and we need you to look at them systematically in a way that will lead you then to investigate deeper if it turns out that the incident—the incidents or the care of this particular person—that there were signs that it wasn't quite as good as it should have been."

Basically there was a man in California who was—he was a big surgeon, and he kept doing back surgeries and claiming he was very successful. Meanwhile all the other notes in the medical records said that the person was in extreme pain, couldn't walk, and couldn't get out of bed, and so on and so forth. The suit ended up costing millions of dollars by the hospital it was that he practiced in. There were, I'm sure, other cases like that, but that's the one that we were always told about.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:30:01.6

Uh-hunh (affirmative). Well, it's pretty striking. So, you were there for two years? Was there any kind of change in what you did over the course of that two years? How did your own understanding of your work evolve in ways other than what you may have already mentioned to me?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:30:20.7

They didn't. But that's basically what changed. I had to manage a few things, but that wasn't hard.

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Chapter 03

B: An Institutional Unit

The History of the Department of Scientific Publications

Story Codes

B: MD Anderson History
B: MD Anderson Snapshot
C: Leadership
C: Mentoring
B: Critical Perspectives on MD Anderson

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:30:33.0

What brought you back to MD Anderson then?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:30:34.7

The person who I left for was about to be fired.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:30:45.1

Tell me about the process of coming back to MD Anderson.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:30:55.2

The elevators at HMB [Houston Main Building] still smelled the same. It was a shock to me that everything smelled exactly the same.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:31:01.8

I'm sorry. HMB stands for—?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:31:03.9

The old Prudential—it was called the Houston Main Building until they suddenly decided we needed two main buildings.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:31:12.8

What did it smell of? Just out of curiosity.

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:31:15.2

It didn't have a bad smell, but it just had a certain smell, and it smelled the same way. I still remember the smell. Proust says you remember the smell forever, and that's really pretty much true.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:31:24.8

I was just going to mention Proust. Memories of MD Anderson past.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:31:36.0

What was it like? I got a lot of—evidently I had some reputation when I left of working well with faculty. I don't know why, because I was a very junior person who had hardly any opportunity to do that, but I guess when I did do it people were impressed. When I came back I got the job of doing several fairly difficult projects.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:32:02.0

What were they?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:32:02.7

Like *The Research Report* and *The General Report* where you have to get reports from faculty who resent greatly the need to write these things because they have other, more important things to do. I can hardly blame them. Basically I learned how to keep a project for which there are many, many, many contributors, and it only takes five or six to screw it up. I think those were my first assignments. I guess I learned how to edit again. I don't remember that well. See, that's another reason I didn't think you should be interviewing me. I don't remember that well.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:32:47.9

I think it may be hard sometimes to remember the simple things in your career when you've gone on to stuff that's a lot more complex. I've had that experience myself explaining things in a classroom when all of a sudden I think—when I see glazed faces I think, all right, I forgot what it was like to be hearing this for the first time.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:33:04.8

Yeah, I'm sure that's true.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:33:09.1

When you came back did you have the same—you were again an assistant editor? Or you know, you were an associate editor.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:33:16.3

No, I came back as an associate.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:33:17.6

Associate editor. Was that a substantial change in responsibility?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:33:24.3

I suppose. It must have been. I know that I had—I don't know if this should be in the history, but you can put it in. I don't care really. I had the ear of Dorothy. She's the one who let me know that the other person was leaving, so she must have respected my abilities, and I know that I was resented by some people who were here. Somehow or other I got put in the favorite category, and I'm not in a position to judge whether I deserve to be.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:34:05.2

That's the way institutions often work. Now work.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:34:08.6

I did my best to just keep my head down and pretend I didn't notice that I was in the category of somebody to be resented.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:34:20.6

I wonder if we could maybe just take a little break and talk about the department in general—just a little about the history of the department. I know it was started by R. Lee Clark, and didn't he found it on the model—I was going to—on the model of the Mayo Clinic Department? Why was that? I know he used the Mayo Clinic as a model for an awful lot of things, but what was it about the workings of the Department of Scientific Publications there that tantalized him?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:34:53.1

I wouldn't say it was the working as much as it was the existence of a centralized editorial department where physicians who may or may not be skilled at writing would have to work less

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hard at making it into something that could be accepted by a journal if they had the help of editors who did that every day, day in and day out. And my understanding is—this was the way the story was told to me and I never interviewed Dr. Clark about it—was that he admired the way the Mayo Clinic managed to provide centralized services in all kinds of areas for the physicians there so that they could devote their primary energies to their jobs, which was to treat patients—to diagnose and treat diseases. I think that’s how. Mayo Clinic did have the very first—that I know of—centralized editorial department which probably formed at the end of the 19th or the beginning of the 20th century. So it may simply have been this department—a similar department up there that caused him to build this one, but I like to think that it was the result of a broader vision than that.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:36:16.9

And was Dorothy Beane—she was the director at the time? Or who was the director at the time of the department—the chair of the department?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:36:24.6

At the beginning?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:36:25.8

When you were here.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:36:27.4

When I was here, Russell Cumley was still the chief but he was not involved in day-to-day activities. Russell Cumley—you have to read the history to this, but I can remind you that he was—that he responded to an ad. Did you get my little history of the department?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:36:47.5

I did, but it’d be nice to have it on record.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:36:51.4

He responded to an ad for a—I don’t know—a medical writer probably at MD Anderson that Dr. Clark had sent out, and he came. And when he arrived they discovered that they had been boyhood friends in some small west Texas town. I don’t remember the name of it anymore. That probably sealed the deal. I don’t know if Dr. Cumley was the best applicant, but he was the best friend who applied. Dr. Cumley was a PhD in Zoology from UT Austin. He was for—I think he learned his career as a writer or editor for Bayer, no [], Chicago. It was a big medical

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pharmaceutical company. Abbott. And he actually had a tremendous influence on me as a leader. I don't know that I succeeded in the way he did, but I made a couple of mistakes and my boss at the time just didn't know how to deal with those kinds of things. Maybe with men or maybe she knew she'd—I don't know what the reason was. I had to go to talk to him. One of the times was I had just ignored the rule that I was supposed to wear a tie every day. I thought it was stupid and so I didn't. I didn't think anything would happen. Then finally they sent me in to see Dr. Cumley, and he said, "You know, I don't care whether you think you're a better editor or not when you wear a tie. I want you to wear a tie." So I appreciated the honesty and the straightforward way he did that. And then another time he gave me a job that I had never done in my life, which was to do an index for a big book. And he said, "I want you to do this index. I know you're a smart person. I know you can figure it out. I want you to do the best job you know how." So I had to go away and read about how to do it and then do it. And again, the same sort of respect for my ability to figure out what and how to do it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:39:29.6

Were there other ways that you felt he was a model of a good leader?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:39:35.7

No. I saw him very little. Those were it really.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:39:46.9

Uh-hunh (affirmative). And so the next question, of course, has to be how do you see yourself as a leader? What's your style when you have to deal with similar things?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:39:58.9

I try to think about that. I try to make it straightforward but people want—I'm a different kind of person than people are today. I think people want explanations. They don't want to just know that I say you must wear a tie, and therefore they [] have to wear a tie. I don't know what my style is. Very not authoritarian. I try to be collaborative. I don't know. Better to ask others than me what my style is.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:40:42.6

Fair enough. Fair enough.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:40:44.9

I've got good people who have been here a long time who like working with me.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:40:56.9

How does that work? I mean what makes it a good team?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:41:03.1

I have ideas and they execute them.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:41:08.4

That's the best kind of collaboration.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:41:11.0

I'm exaggerating of course. They have ideas also, and sometimes I have to help them figure out how to execute them, but that's closer to the truth than we might want to say or admit. It's not that I don't participate in the execution. I very much do and guide it. But if not for them these ideas would be nothing more than that.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:41:40.3

Two followup questions on that. One is who are some of the other significant people that you worked with when you came back from Chicago?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:41:50.9

Other than Dorothy? Well, there were people in the department. None of these people would be known by anybody but me.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:42:09.0

Were there others who were influential on you? Or even outside the department? It's a big place.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:42:24.6

Excellent question. It makes me think about it and to realize that mainly I just looked to Dorothy and to myself.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:42:37.1

And what did Dorothy provide as a model or guide?

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:42:45.1

She did two things. She let me know when I screwed up. As my career advanced, she mostly let me know in a way that said that it was her fault she didn't let me know these kinds of hurdles were in the way, and I didn't surmount them quite as well as I should have. I'm not proud of the fact, but the truth is that mostly I tried to figure out what I was supposed to do on my own. And I'm not sure that—other than Dorothy—that I got help as a leader until the last ten or twenty years when people around me—Melissa Burkett who's on the staff here, a man named John Phelps who used to work here, Jim Bowen who was once a VP for Academic Affairs. They influenced me in different ways—in the ways of—well, from Melissa I learned maybe not how to plan but what it took to plan. Thank God that she was a planner. And from Jim Bowen and—I forgot who else I mentioned just now.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:44:18.4

Burkett. John. John Phelps.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:44:52.0

I learned that not because he told me that, but because I noticed that when he had a business communication, it began in a very friendly way. I learned that.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:45:09.5

Why do you say that collaboration is not MD Anderson's middle name?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:45:18.0

I don't mean that about scientists collaborating with other scientists. I mean that about the leadership, the institutional indecisiveness over almost any other characteristic

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:45:28.9

Hmm.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:45:33.1

So if you have an idea, you execute it, even if you've already involved somebody else in the execution of it. If you get an idea that you think is great, you just execute it. You don't even think about this other person ostensibly involved within the object. When it's all done, you show it to them, maybe.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:45:53.5

Hmm. Interesting.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:45:56.2

It's so much cleaner to do it yourself than involve other people in it. At least that's my impression.

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Chapter 04

A: The Administrator

Developing a New Editorial Perspective for Scientific Publications Story Codes

- B: Institutional Processes
- A: Definitions, Explanations, Translations
- B: Building/Transforming the Institution
- C: Professional Practice
- C: The Professional at Work

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:46:04.9

I also wanted to ask you about some of those projects. You said that you—Dorothy told you, basically, to go off and do some projects. And I'm curious, what were some of the projects that you at [Scientific Publications](#) began to initiate on your own?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:46:21.5

Well, the one thing that I recall that I didn't do so well on was I had this idea that this general report thing that we did, this collection of reports from the various departments, was dull and boring and nobody wanted to read it. And so let's invent a report that had themes and collect things based on these themes. Get people to write things or write them yourself, whatever. Get pictures that related to it, make it interesting.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:46:49.9

Uh-hunh (affirmative).

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:46:49.9

Well, it turns out that something like that is a lot of work. There's a reason why things are boring, and you have very clear lines of authority, and you know who the heck's going to like what, and you don't care what it is. It's because it's very hard to get a big group of people to do something. And so I had—it took me forever to do whatever it is I did, and it wasn't all that great.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:47:14.6

So back to the boring reports after that?

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Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:47:16.1

Yeah, pretty much.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:47:18.1

Yeah?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:47:18.3

Or even dumped it. We may have dropped it in favor of something Public Affairs was doing, which was perhaps a little more interesting. So we stuck to the research report, which was a collection of reports from the laboratories about the research programs. So I didn't—I don't mean each project—I think I just got assigned stuff that wasn't doing so well. I don't even remember what they were, and it was my job to pull them out. It wasn't that hard, really.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:47:56.8

Uh-hunh (affirmative). What about your shift into publications coordinator in '78 to '84? Was that a substantial shift in responsibility?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:48:05.1

I began to take responsibility for other people's success and for interviewing people and interviewing candidates and helping shape policies in the department with Dorothy.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:48:22.9

Do you recall some of the policy decisions that were being made at the time?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:48:27.0

Well, I don't know if it was when I was coordinator—or—what was the next job?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:48:35.8

I was wondering because I was unsure of when you actually became assistant director. Because it sounded like you might have dovetailed—

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:48:44.4

Maybe it was the same thing. Maybe I got confused. They're not much different, whatever it was.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD
0:48:48.8
Okay.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)
0:48:50.1
It may just have been a change in title, truthfully.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD
0:48:51.9
Right. Yeah. Because it says you were publications coordinator until '84, and then it says '84 to present you were director. So that's why I was wondering. Maybe they were—

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)
0:49:01.2
They're probably essentially just a payroll title change. So what was the question?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD
0:49:08.6
I was just asking about the change in responsibility, and if there were policy decisions that you were involved in during that time.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)
0:49:17.0
Huh. I can see that certain things weren't getting done the way the faculty wanted them done.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD
0:49:24.6
Such as?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)
0:49:27.8
Well, mainly manuscripts were edited at a pace that was up to the editors, and it could be quickly or slowly, and it didn't seem anybody much cared, except I knew the faculty cared. And so I proposed and she agreed that we systematize and work harder at getting things done—those things done quickly. Because everybody wanted to do the more glamorous things, like edit books. At the time, editing books was more glamorous. And it's—you know—it's a project. You start here on one day, and three months later you're finished here, whereas manuscripts are being reviewed all day long. Every day you got another manuscript to edit. And that's, for most people, not as much fun. So those tended to fall to the wayside.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:50:26.9

This would be kind of a side question, but I'm curious about—mentally and intellectually, what is it like to start on a manuscript that may be in a certain topic area, and then switch, maybe two hours later, to a manuscript on a totally different topic area. Do you find that it's taken you a long time to master a lot of scientific terminology or basic themes in the different specialties in order to do this kind of work?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:51:04.2

First of all, I think that an editor who knows how to edit can edit anything and bring a lot that the author thinks, when you're finished thinking of the subject, which is not true. What you know is that the readers have certain expectations in a story, and the author has set you up for something and then failed to deliver. And so you can—they can be stunned that you would know that this is what the next thing they should be telling, but really, it's not that you know this field. It's that you know what readers expect. On the other hand, it's also true that if you know a subject well, you can provide—you can be more incisive somehow or other. You can more quickly recognize that they're failing to deliver either for their particular audience, and that's a tough one. It's easier to recognize when it's a big audience what kind of questions need to be answered. It's harder when they're mostly writing for their peers. And that takes—you can't switch around—What am I trying to say here? You can only have command of a few fields like that. I think I'm answering your question, believe it or not.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:52:26.7

No, you are. You are. What are your particular fields that you feel you have good command over when it comes to that specific work?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:52:35.9

Well, it's more basic sciences, truthfully. I mean, I have an undergraduate experience in basic science, and even though none of that knowledge is current, it means nothing. The knowledge itself means nothing, the working in that area, understanding how people demonstrate things indirectly and how they measure things and how this really means that helps me understand what they should be describing. How this is—what they just told me is not good enough—that they've used adjectives when there are numbers available to them and they should be using numbers, and so on and so forth. There are many people here who are much better at the clinical style, although I would say I was once pretty good at it, but I have done less and less of that over the years. Lost a little bit of my touch in that area. But again, in every case it's a story that we should be looking for and that if you just stay focused on what the reader's needs are, you can switch around between subjects without a great deal of difficulty. Now, you're exaggerating how quickly, how much you have to switch. We're not editing anything in two hours and so it might be, at best, the next day, but more likely in the next couple of days.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:54:07.5

I was just curious because—I mean, I’m personalizing it a little bit, but I know how it’s been for me to prepare for a lot of these interviews. One of my first interviews, [Isaiah] Josh Fidler [DVM, PH.D. [Oral History Interview]], it’s like learning a foreign language. You can learn how to ask a question, but do understand enough to understand the answer so you can continue the conversation? And then I have to turn around and interview Margaret Kripke, and it’s [photoimmunology](#). So there’s—okay, it’s kind of getting these different language bases, and it’s a little jarring to go back and forth, and it’s like, okay, when am I speaking which language, and how do I maneuver that? So that’s why I asked.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:54:46.3

Yeah. I can see that the challenge for you would be huge in that way, and I can also imagine that, in fact, number one, you’re over-preparing. You probably don’t need to prepare quite as much as what you need to be. For somebody like Josh, there is no over-preparing.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:55:02.6

Exactly. Yeah. I mean, it’s—

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:55:04.4

Margaret probably would have let you get by with quite a few mistakes. She wouldn’t have cared because she understands. And Josh would let you get by with none. He’d call you an idiot if you didn’t know his— “Who sent that idiot over here?” (laughs).

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:55:17.6

So would Frederick Becker [MD [Oral History Interview]]. (laughs). No, no. But people like to talk to you, which is delightful, and I’m sure you’re—well, I’m a personality that over-prepares. But I also just know from my own writing that switching between projects sometimes can be— it’s a—

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:55:37.0

Well, writing’s tougher, come on!

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:55:38.1

Yeah, it is tough. It’s tough. Absolutely. And you’re working with people’s words. And when

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you're editing and you have to kind of enter into their thought process and think about how to manage that so it's also a communicative act on the other end. So yeah, that's what I—

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:55:52.8

But I don't enter into the author's thought process. That's not what I'm worried about. Because if I did that, I'm going to overlook stuff that matters to the reader.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:56:02.6

To the reader. Yeah.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:56:05.9

And we'll say, "Oh that's what he means." Well, I don't care if I can figure out what he means. What I care about is whether the reader can figure out what he means when he wants to. Does he have to reread that sentence in order to get it? If he does, then you've screwed up. I know that screwed up is kind of an exaggeration, but you make it harder on the reader, for sure. And readers are intolerant of that sort of thing, especially in grant proposals.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:56:31.6

Yeah. Well, I imagine increasingly so, too. People's attention spans and expectations have—I mean, attention spans have shortened and expectations have gone up.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:56:44.0

Well, grant readers have twenty to read in like two weeks.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:56:45.7

That's right. Right.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:56:48.5

Probably exaggerating.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:56:50.7

How receptive are faculty, do you find? And also, have there been changes? I mean, when you began working with people, the faculty in the '70s, was there a different type of feeling in relationship with you as editor than there would be with editors today?

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Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:57:10.8

Well, for sure, in the sense that editing is now completely voluntary, whereas then it was mandatory. What wasn't mandatory was paying attention to what we did. So that could be discouraging to an editor, to realize, well—we still don't know what we did, but we know that they asked for our help. They wanted our help, decided they needed our help, whereas in the mandatory days, they didn't have a choice.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:57:44.8

Now, you mentioned earlier that you were responsible for making that change. When did that happen, and why did you make that decision?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:57:56.7

I made it when faculty began to clamor for grant editing help, and we just didn't have the capacity to do it. So although it should have been a philosophical choice, it was actually a workload choice. We're glad that it was more or less forced on us, but I proposed that in order to do this, we stop doing this, which is editing manuscripts of people who didn't want us to.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:58:25.3

Which only makes the process more difficult, too.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:58:28.7

Or they just don't care. You're sitting there working away like a crazy man, and they just toss it in the can, you know? Why not? I don't want this.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:58:37.9

Right. When did that shift take place?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:58:43.6

I'm thinking it was like '84 or '85.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:58:44.4

So that was pretty quickly after you became director.

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Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:58:46.7

Yeah. Maybe. I may have the date wrong.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:58:51.0

Why? Would you rather it not be when you were director? (laughs). I'm sorry.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:58:54.6

Well, I don't think I did it that quickly. I think it took me longer than that. So it might be more like '90, I believe. I can't remember. I could probably figure it out if it's important.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:59:05.4

Yeah. Well, there'll be a chance for you to have a look at the transcript and add a date if you need to add a date. I'm just curious when that came around. At the time, do you recall how many editors you had on staff when that clamoring started? And I guess there's another piece of that question, because here you have all these faculty clamoring. You have not enough staff to satisfy, but then there's also the issue of what was happening with funding outside the institution, that meant grants were suddenly so important.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:59:35.8

I don't think funding was that tough in those days. Probably more in the low twenty percent range, whereas now it's below ten. That was a—I don't know what question to answer.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:59:54.6

I know. I'm sorry. I tend to ask convoluted—how many people were on staff at the time, when you made the decision?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:00:05.2

I think there were like ten or twelve editors.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:00:08.4

Yeah, okay. Okay. And then the other part of the question was, what was going on that made faculty suddenly be asking so much for help with grant writing?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:00:22.0

I'd like to think it is that they saw what we could do on manuscripts and grants were even more important to them. I couldn't tell you what the truth is. And many faculty don't finish grants until the last minute, until they can't use us anyway. But we did do about 250 a year now. Sometimes we only have a day and sometimes we have a week. And to me, the people who give us a day don't really want us, except to make sure they haven't made gross mistakes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:01:02.3

So you alluded to the fact a few times that you kind of have to convince the faculty that what you do is important. Or you have to ring the bell, like, we're here. We're available. We can do something for you. What's that self-promotion—why does that have to happen, and how do you do that?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:01:26.5

Well, it has to happen for a couple of reasons. I'd say the main one is that the—well, a lot of reasons. Faculty are smart people, and often their writing is their ego, right? So we are not the determining people. We're not the ones who decide whether they get into a journal or not. The kind of editing that goes on in journals today is mediocre at best. So the models of what an editor does are really, really poor out there. So if you don't already have experience with us, you might think that we do what they did. So what's the point? There is none. You don't need that kind of editing. And we're not—for the most part, we're not scientists. And the first thought of the scientist is, how can somebody who's not a scientist help me? And we can't help them with their science. That's their problem. But we can help them describe their science. So I think—we do mailings and things to the faculty and so on, and they don't—most of them don't remember until there is time for the paper that we even exist. And so there are groups of people here who don't know about us. Not because they haven't been told, but because they didn't pay attention when they were. Because they already dismissed the editors or because they've just been told thirty other things. Which one are they supposed to remember? But we believe and expect that their colleagues who have used us will say, "You know, why don't you give Sci Pubs a try? They can help." So there's probably a lot of word of mouth there. Why do we have to convince them to use a free service that should make their work better? I don't really know other than the sort of things I've said.

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Chapter 05
B: An Institutional Unit
A Reader-Focused Philosophy: Editing and Teaching

Story Codes

- B: Institutional Processes
- A: Definitions, Explanations, Translations
- B: Building/Transforming the Institution
- D: On Research and Researchers
- C: Professional Practice
- C: The Professional at Work

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:03:56.3

Yeah. How did you end up stepping into the director's role?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:04:04.1

Well, Dorothy retired, basically. Jim Bowen picked me of all the candidates, which there might have been zero, for all I know.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:04:21.4

How did things change? Did you have specific goals in mind when you knew you could take the reins?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:04:29.2

Nah, I'm not that kind of person. I just react. I look around. I see what people are noticing. I see what people care about. I see whether I care about what they care about, and if I do, then I try to do something.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:04:42.7

So what did you care about during those first couple of years when you were director? What leapt out at you?

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Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:04:49.5

How to edit well for people, to do the kind of editing that they needed and wanted as quickly as they wanted.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:04:54.8

Uh-hunh (affirmative). So there was the turn-around time. But the turn-around time changed. You said you picked up the pace.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:05:01.9

Well, earlier than that I changed the expectations about turn-around time. Once there were none, and I changed that. And actually I got a group within the department shortly after I became director to decide what the turn-around time should be, and that included how quickly we should communicate with the author when we had an assignment and how we should schedule things, and so on. It's pretty much stayed in place since then, our turn-around times. We've had a little bit longer, but truthfully, some of the writing has gotten a little bit worse.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:05:41.3

So, the process is an MD Anderson faculty member has a manuscript that they need help with. They ring you guys up or come on in, and say what? And then what happens?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:05:54.4

Actually, they usually send us an email that says, "I'm sending this journal manuscript to *Cancer*. Can you help me edit it?"

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:06:04.0

Okay.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:06:04.2

And so we do call them. We send them an email and say, "When do you want it back?" They say, and we say, "We can do that." And then we send it back to them. And we use track changes and we type in queries, and they take what they want of it. And most of the time we don't know how much of it they want. But if we don't see their work again, we figure they didn't like it. I mean, that's way too indirect, but frankly, we have all the work we can use. It's hard to poke deeper and try to change. So we've made decisions over the years that copyediting, while essential, is not the important aspect of what we do. The important aspect is meeting the

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expectations of the reader. And we have developed a model of what a manuscript that meets expectation of the reader looks like. And so we help authors who fail to address issues in the model. We point that out to them as best as we can. We develop that model in the course of developing our writing workshops.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:07:16.7

When did the writing workshops start?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:07:18.8

I had a talk to give, and I believe it was 2000—it might have been '99—about the special issues faced by editors of manuscripts written by international scientists. And my first inclination was to simply talk about the things I had noticed over my career, because I thought that's what they were asking. But the staff thought that was too superficial, frankly, when I told them what I was thinking of doing. And I told Dr. Tomasovic about that. So it must have been later than that, because he didn't get his job 'til '95, I think. So maybe we're talking 2000, somewhere around there. It must have been around 2000. Between us we decided—no. I think he sent me to Harry Gibbs, because the idea was that this would be an interesting question for the VP for Diversity. And he set me up with his communications consultant from California who helped him with various things. And she and I then met several times and set up a series of focus groups in which we explored the difficulties of writing for people who don't speak English as a native language.

That lead to interesting questions and interesting problems, which I summarized at the end of the article that we wrote about this exercise. And basically, I hinted, if I didn't outright say, that institutions would find this very expensive. What I was really thinking was that MD Anderson would never spend the money to do this. And I talked about it with Dr. Tomasovic and he said, "Well, what are you gonna do?" (laughs). I thought he would say, "Yeah, that's too bad." But no. He said, "What are you gonna do?" And so we did a series of focus groups with faculty and trainees regarding what they thought they needed in terms of education, and we reached our own conclusion, which was that we could never teach somebody how to write a great sentence. We could never teach somebody how to write a great phrase. We could never teach somebody who didn't learn it on their own. But we could teach them how to assemble what sentences they can write—logical and conventional framework—and so we decided to teach the conventional framework. But to do that, well, we had to figure out exactly what it looked like, which we did.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:10:21.9

Can you tell me what that framework looks like, just quickly?

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Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:10:26.6

Well, the barest part of it, you know, is what's called IMRAD: introduction, methods, results, and discussion. But each piece of that has a series of ideas that must be described in a certain order in order for people who expect to read a manuscript constructed in a certain way to be satisfied. It also satisfies a certain logical sequence for readers. It's not just that people expect this; they expect it because it's become convention and because it really does work. So we tell them about four or five things they have to do in the introduction in order to do them. We tell them—and they think they—we tell them about how to put your results together. They think they already know it, but they don't. Same with the methods. And we tell them about the expectations, about if you're going to describe a result, there ought to be a method somewhere that allows you to get that result. You'd be surprised at how often there isn't. And then in the discussion we tell them how to relate that discussion to their paper, their results, and to those that are in the literature, what issues they need to deal with in the discussion overtly. Get there, study it—greatest possible impact. Also talk about the abstract and the title and a little bit about the references. And we talk about publishing procedures, because we're assuming most of these people don't understand the issues that they face, just in the process itself, submitting a manuscript and getting judged—getting their manuscript judged, responding to comments and criticism, dealing with that on an appropriate level.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:12:27.8

Uh-hunh (affirmative). So tell me how the creation of these guidelines then translated into these classes that you were teaching or the workshops.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:12:43.4

We have checklists online which you can look at, if you want to more detail, but basically that's not the order. The order is we had to teach a class. What are we going to teach them? We need to teach them the skeleton. What does the skeleton look like?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:12:56.7

Okay. Uh-hunh (affirmative).

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:12:57.2

And so we found the best articles we could find. We read books where people talked about this, but not in the way that we wanted them to. We found examples from the literature to illustrate how to do each of those. We messed up some of those examples to show how you shouldn't do it. And we created this curriculum. Like that. It took a long time. It took probably six months for us to do this, along with all our other work. And we produced a workbook. I will never, ever,

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ever forget the first time I taught, and it was the first class, and there was an Italian there, and he was just going through the book before the class even started. And I said, “Stefano! What are you doing?” He said, “I never, ever have had anything like this before.” They had all taken writing workshops. They have never been taught anything they could use.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:14:04.9

That’s amazing.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:14:06.6

I mean, I think it’s different now. I think people do know how to do that now. But ten years ago, writing workshops were people who knew how to write getting up there and saying, “Do what I do. Write clearly.”

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:14:22.0

Whatever that means.

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Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:14:22.5

“Be logical. Write it as short as you can.” Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Useless advice.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:14:32.5

So where did the money come from to put these courses on?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:14:38.2

Well, it came out of our hides (laughs). We have had probably two positions added to the departments, because we do have another education program—the one I told you about, Scientific English. That one we actually were given staffing for. We have a person on staff who has a doctorate in education with a specialty in English as a second language.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:15:09.6

And that person’s name is?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:15:11.3

Mark Picus. And he teaches 5 sessions a week. Also he has a little conversation group that comes—little, fifteen, twenty people come over here every Friday at noon to just sit around and talk English to each other and to people who do speak English well. There’s a theory behind this program, and I’m sure it’s right—how could it not be?—which is that ordinary ESL teaches you how to—you know—find a grocery store or the metro stop. But it doesn’t teach how to participate in laboratory discussions, how to answer your boss when he asks you a question, how to indicate disagreement in a respectful way. It doesn’t teach you scientific discourse. It doesn’t teach you how to make a presentation that people will understand or appreciate. There’s a tremendous amount of hindrance to the success of international scientists that come about not only from their inability to write their articles well but also from their inability to participate in the discussions that drive science. Their lab, the journal group clubs, their presentation classes, their this, their that, their something else. So they either speak up—probably it’s not an either/or, but some of them are afraid to speak up because they don’t know how. It’s not a tradition in their own country to speak up. That’s the rudest thing you can possibly do. Or then, also, a little that they are actually rude—they don’t mean to be rude, but it sounds rude to the person they’re saying it to, because they don’t know enough how to couch it in terms that don’t seem rude. So they just shut up, and then everybody thinks they’re stupid because they don’t talk. It’s very important, and I’m so glad the institution has recognized that.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:17:29.4

So were these two initiatives established at about the same time? You have the writing and then the Scientific English.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:17:37.1

Not too far apart. Say, three years apart.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:17:39.9

Was it—and so you said this was probably around the early 2000s?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:17:46.1

Yeah. The Scientific English was probably more like 2006 or so.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:17:54.5

So obviously this was responding to a change in the demographics of MD Anderson faculty.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:18:01.5

Yeah. But the fact that I got invited to describe this means in some ways that it's changing all over the country. The council of biology editors invited me to give the whole—yes, I think that's what it was—invited me to talk about this. Oh, go ahead, I'm sorry, but I interrupted. You had a question.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:18:25.1

No, no I didn't. I was actually just trying to figure out where to go next. I mean, I'm interested, obviously. The teaching that you do here is so critical, and I just want to make sure that I have a really good understanding of what exactly it is you offer. And then how it works more for the faculty members. So you do courses on articles, but then also on grant writing, correct? And then—

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:18:50.8

We invite a speaker on [grant writing](#). And the theory is that nobody would believe us, since we don't actually ever participate in study sections. We don't ever actually write grants. Or they wouldn't believe us as much as they would somebody who's been through it all, and we have discovered a very effective group who have themselves developed a model of a good grant

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proposal. We use that model in our editing of grants, because we believe in it, again. It's just structured in a way that makes all the sense in the world. There's a difference between grant writing and manuscript writing. I'm sure you know that. And you have to deal with issues from people you don't know anything about, who, while you wish they were as expert as you, they are not. And while you wish they would give you the benefit of the doubt, they won't, and so on and so forth.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:19:53.6

What's the organization you work with for the grant writing?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:19:58.7

It's called [Grant Writers, Incorporated](#).

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:20:02.6

Nice and simple and logical. (laughs) Is there anything else you'd like to say about the significance of those teaching initiatives?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:20:16.4

Well, they have influenced our ability to edit, out of the fact that we had to construct this model. We all knew that things were wrong with manuscripts, and we did our best to deal with that. We didn't have a systematic—things were missing from manuscripts, and we did our best to deal with that. But now we have a structure in which to be able to systematically notice what's missing and not leave it to chance, quite so much anyway. So really, the editing, what isn't there has been tremendously improved by our work and education.

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Chapter 06

B: Building the Institution

Key In-House Publications

Story Codes

- B: Institutional Processes
- A: Definitions, Explanations, Translations
- B: Building/Transforming the Institution
- C: Professional Practice
- C: The Professional at Work
- C: Discovery and Success
- C: Discovery, Creativity and Innovation

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:21:04.3

Now, you had mentioned some other issues that you—or some other initiatives that you took on when you were director. I think we've talked about the first four of them. You also mentioned that you were the first department to move in to—I'm sorry.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:21:26.6

Go ahead.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:21:28.3

No. (laughs)

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:21:29.6

I'm just laughing because I had nothing to do with that.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:21:32.1

You didn't? Well, why don't you finish my sentence, because I am ashamed to say I can't read my own handwriting in the note I took. Oh! The former Prudential building.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:21:38.9

In 1971. MD Anderson bought the former Prudential building in 1971. We were handed offices specially designed for us, opposite the research medical library, way over on the first floor of the old building. But the Office of Clinic Administration wanted our offices. And there is no service department that can succeed in fighting off the Office of Clinic Administration. So we ended up

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over here—over there, at that building that no longer exists, in '72, actually. And what happens when you're the first people to be sent away from the central? What do you think? You think, oh, God. They think that they don't need it. Too far away. Nobody will come to you. So it was distressing at first, but we got over it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:22:34.0

And so how did you deal with the space issue?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:22:38.5

That problem, through the mail. In those days it was mail.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:22:43.1

Oh, okay. So that wasn't that big a deal, then.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:22:44.7

No, it really wasn't.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:22:47.7

Oh. What about this interesting first—of the first institution to put a publication on Gopher services? Tell me about that.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:22:59.7

Well, it is a research report. I don't know about the first institution, but that's the first place, I think, that any MD Anderson publication went up on the World Wide Web. I'm guessing. I don't know that for a fact, but I think it is. The other kinds of software that you use to go up on the World Wide Web didn't exist. It was a Gopher thing.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:23:25.1

So when was this?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:23:33.2

(whistles) I'm thinking early '80s. It was a server managed by the [University of Minnesota](#), which is why it was called the [Gopher Server](#). What replaced it? I don't guess it was called the World Wide Web, then. Maybe it was just called the Internet.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:24:04.3

So tell me about the decision to do that.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:24:14.3

I don't remember. I suppose—I mean, you can imagine what it might be to think you've got a catalog of the research activities at MD Anderson and not everybody who wants to know is going to have that catalog when they want to know. So the whole reason for the existence of the Internet, really—or, not the reason for it, but the best use, as far as I'm concerned, is how can you know what you want to know from disparate sources when you want know, and not when you don't want to know. So there's no sense sending the research report to a thousand people, hoping one of them will want to look. Though we did do that. There's another thousand people who will never get it who might want to know, who's working in this area or that area.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:25:05.8

So that's really early, though.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:25:08.0

It is.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:25:10.5

I mean, that's cool. (laughs)

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:25:14.8

Yeah. Well, you know what, we—wouldn't publishers do that? Wouldn't publishers think about media in which to publish? Wouldn't they think about the best way to get a product into the hands of who they think are their customers?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:25:29.7

Well, I'm just curious about what the conversations were. I mean, here you're—

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:25:33.6

I'm thinking that's what they are. What are we going to do this thing? I mean, a great big old fat book that we can't send around. It costs us this many dollars, every one of them. There are

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students who want to know whether they want to come here. How do they find out what we're doing? Et cetera, et cetera. I think that way that it's kind of evolved for everyone. That we early just means that we were a group—I think it just means that we were a group involved in publishing, and we thought about how you publish. I would say, personally, my point of view is that there have been 2 groups at this institution who think about what they're doing, the best way to do what they're doing, what is important to MD Anderson, and what is not important. What should you not be doing? I'm not sure this is useful at all. But I thought that Scientific Publications and the Department of Biomathematics, in the old days, had people who thought about what it was they were doing in a broader sense than just the limited question right in front of them. They thought about efficient ways of doing things. They thought about their audience and what they really wanted to know. They understood the relationship between what they were doing and what other people needed to know or needed to do, or whatever. And I thought biomath, because of the kinds of people that were in it, were bringing up that, and I thought we were bringing that because we had those kinds of people too.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:27:08.9

Who were some of the people at Biomath that were kind of leading that philosophical approach to what they did?

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Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:27:15.6

I don't know that it's philosophical. I do think it was the people that they hired. And probably the way they thought about things and talked about things. So Stuart Zimmerman that was in the chair, and there's an interview somewhere with him. Almost surely is the one who shaped that sort of thing. And I know very well a man named Howard Thames, who also thinks that way. And I could go all the way down into the lowest—they're not low, but the most junior, or even the technicians in that department. I could tell you that they think in that way. David Gutierrez would be an obvious person, but you don't know him and will have no reason to interview him, but he's—well, what is he? I don't know exactly what he is. But he's not on the faculty. He's a person who helps other biostatisticians and biomathematicians get their jobs done.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:28:19.3

So this kind of long-range thinking and broad-context thinking was a very important cornerstone to Scientific Publications and how you saw yourself getting your work done here? Attention to audience when it came to actually processing a manuscript at an editorial level, and then thinking about those institutional and national and even international arenas in which this material needed to be received in order to solidify the careers of individuals and raise the reputation of the institution. I mean, this was sort of—

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:28:59.1

It sounds great.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:28:59.3

It does?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:28:59.3

I'm for it. (laughs)

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:29:06.2

No?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:29:07.8

It's not no, and it could be yes.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:29:11.5

It could be yes? No, but I mean, I'm just curious. I'm imagining the '80s—I was aware of computers in the '80s. I used a mainframe computer in the '80s. Did I know about the World Wide Web? No. I remember learning about a modem. So here, you know, I wasn't at a place—in a career where I had to think about those issues. But here it is in the '80s, and you people are here doing this work, and you're running into each other in the hall and talking about what you do and this issue of the Web comes up. And so I'm wondering, what's the strategizing? What is the, "Huh, how can we use this creatively?" I mean, that's just a creative thing going on in the culture. Suddenly this new accessibility is present. So I think it's neat that you jumped on it. And I'm just wondering how did you go about doing it? I mean, what was the process of getting something ready to put on the Web? Did it cost money? Who funded it? Who had to get behind it?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:30:12.9

I don't remember, but I know somebody who does, if you really want to know.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:30:18.2

Who is that?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:30:19.5

Melissa.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:30:20.1

Oh! Huh.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:30:25.1

So basically, I don't think it was Melissa who had the idea, but somebody in the department had the idea. And enough other people liked the idea and recognized the idea as good, and our relationship with biomathematics was close in many ways. Melissa has close relations to some of those people; I had close relations with them. Other people on the staff knew them and worked with them. It didn't feel like a stretch. It just felt like something that needed to be done. When somebody had the idea, it was recognized as a good one right away, as I recall. Probably don't recall very well, but that's what I think happened. It just happened. We didn't sit down and say, "How can we publish this?" Somebody said, "You know what, there's this thing now that the University of Minnesota has called the Gopher server, and you can put things on the Internet with that. And you don't have to be at the University of Minnesota. You can do it from here."

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And that's it. Okay, let's do it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:31:38.3

Let's do it. Were there other things that happened like that? Kind of not top-down, but the bottom-up kind of ideas that helped this department get material out more creatively, more efficiently?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:31:57.2

I don't actually know. We were allowed by the financial people to have a big word processing system called the [NBI](#). This was before the ubiquitous personal computer. And it was invented, basically, for law firms so they can retrieve information and glue it together easily. More easily than they had been doing. And it was adopted for desktop work of sorts. It had no application as far as editing went, at the time, but it did as far as communication goes.

So anyway, it became clear at some point that it was time to think about personal computers for the department. I'm thinking this might be the way to what you said. And so I said, "Well, let's put together a group, three or four editors, and ask them to determine whether we should be a Macintosh office or a PC office." So is that an example of what you're talking about? And they did. They said—well, after quite a bit of studying, they decided we should be a Macintosh office. And that's pretty obvious for a publishing group in those days. But I worked at it—I don't know why I'm saying this. I'm not sure it does address the issue you just said. I'd say the education program is a bit like that. Because it was built by everybody. There were three or four people at the top who said, "Here are the problems," but the solutions were all invented by small groups who did the research and proposed solutions.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:33:49.1

Uh-hunh (affirmative). And all in house, as you said. It came out of our hides; it was not a special thing. Right.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:33:54.5

We did work with a consultant in adult education to be sure that we knew how to teach adults; we more or less knew. And the same consultant helped us with multicultural communication, because we felt we needed to improve our ability in those areas. And then we have sent people to what amount to presentation workshops in Dallas, by a group that does mainly stuff for sales people. Sort of increase the dynamism of the teachers. So I don't say we did it all ourselves. There were things we didn't know how to do. We didn't know what was important about adult—this was the accelerated learning program at the [U of H](#) then, too.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:34:49.6

Oh, interesting. Well, the portrait I'm getting of the department is one that allows a lot of room for creativity. That people can come up with an idea, and it's like, "Oh, okay. Huh. Yeah." Am I wrong?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:35:08.3

I don't think about it. (laughs)

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:35:09.6

You don't think about it? All right. (laughs)

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:35:15.3

Sure.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:35:19.8

We haven't really talked about the various publications that the department produces, and there is a whole list of them going back to—well, is there one that you'd like to tell me about before the others? Some of them were established very early.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:35:40.4

Well, I think the one that might be most interesting—it's not in existence anymore, but one's [The Year Book of Cancer](#), which was basically an invention of Dr. Clark's. I'm sure, though, he took the model from books done in other areas by [Year Book Medical Publishing](#). People posed this model to them, this book series to them, but he proposed to run it the way he wanted it run. Instead of out of their offices it was run out of our office. And it was done for—what? Forty years or something. Many, many years.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:36:17.6

Yeah. 1956 to 1988.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:36:21.9

Well, that's thirty-two. But anyway. It's a collection of abstracts written by the authors of the original papers, selected by an editorial board, collection of abstracts about cancer that the editorial board felt that people needed to know. This was in the days before databases and so on. These books were, in essence, printed databases, I guess you could say. So a little bit of basic science in there. And you can see one if you'd like. But I'm very proud of the [Cancer Care Series](#), because I did that. It would not exist except for me. And that is one accomplishment I would say is mine.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:37:09.9

I don't even have that on my list. So tell me about the *Cancer Care Series*. When was that started?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:37:16.0

In 2000, basically. I started work on it in 1990. It took me ten years to get the right people interested.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:37:27.2

And what's its purpose?

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Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:37:30.3

Its purpose is to tell how we treat cancer at various sites. Here's the model. This was in Advanced Patient Care at MD Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute, which is our old name.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:37:49.7

Yeah. R. Lee Clark and Clifton Howell. Wow. It's a heavy book.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:37:52.8

That book is from 1976, so we're now talking, well, at least fourteen years later, and by the time the series that I'm talking about got started, it was twenty-four years later. So in the meantime, there had been nothing systematic written about what MD Anderson's standards of care are. Everything that you know, that you could know about how MD Anderson treated cancer appeared in journal articles, which meant it was always about the latest improvements. The latest changes in care and changes in diagnosis, changes in treatment, changes in aftercare.

So assembling that into some sort of holistic picture of what we do—I can't imagine how you would do it. That book did it. But I'll tell you, Dr. Clark was—and the era of Dr. Clark was different times. So he could stand up and say, "I want this book, and you will do it." And they did. Some people more reluctantly than others, but in the end, this book was published in '76. And this department edited the book. I don't know what else they did on it, because it happened while I was gone. I've talked to clinic leaders, beginning in 1990, about a replacement for that book. I got a lot of encouragement, but I couldn't find a champion anywhere. And it needed a champion in order to succeed.

And how did I finally succeed? I noticed that the Anderson associates, which was what the Alumni Association was called at the time, was doing a series of medical meetings regarding standards of care at MD Anderson under Ralph Freedman, who was the chairman at the time. And I went and talked to him a little bit about it. And I said, "How could we fit this idea into what you're doing?" And he jumped on it as something that could be a project of the Alumni Association. And I recognized, maybe before I had talked to him or maybe afterwards, that there was no way we could ever get everyone at MD Anderson to do this at once. So it had to be a series of books, and here's one of them, *One on One with Cancer*. And there have been seven books in the series so far, two of them, *Breast Cancer*, have been first and second editions. So we heavily intervened as editors in this book series, because the book is intended for nonacademic physicians, but physicians here are often ignorant of how to write for people who aren't academic physicians. So we have to do a lot of editorial work in order to make it work. The editors work pretty hard, too, because unlike many academic books, it is not a collection of your best friend's chapters. It is a collection of chapters that begin in one place—that do not

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overlap and do not under lap, if that makes any sense. But actually is comprehensive. Well, we think comprehensively on the subject.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:41:19.8

So to whom is this distributed?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:41:22.8

Well, it's sold by a publisher, and that is [Springer](#). My goal was to get it to nonacademic physicians. I don't think they do a very good job of that, for one very particular reason. I don't think there's an association of nonacademic physicians, so you can't buy a mailing list. All I can do is offer it and hope they notice that it is in the offering. And it's online and can be bought through Amazon. But I don't know that they do a good job on marketing it to the people we think are the primary audience.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:42:02.1

What's the issue that you have in progress now?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:42:04.5

There are three in progress now. There's—one is at the publisher, on bone sarcoma. One we hope—much delayed, on head and neck cancer will be going to the publisher shortly. Two are in development. One on emergency medicine, emergency oncology medicine, whatever—I'm not sure exactly how to title it—and one on survivorship.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:42:29.6

Wow.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:42:34.1

Then there's been a [Lung Cancer](#), two [Breast Cancers](#), a first and second edition of breast, [Gynecologic Cancer](#), [Pediatric Oncology](#). What am I missing? Oh. [GI Oncology](#).

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:42:54.0

OGI?

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Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:42:54.6

No. Not OGI. Oh. O-H, comma, GI.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:42:59.0

Oh, GI! Oh, okay. (laughs)

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:43:01.7

And [Tumors of the Brain and Spine](#). So that reminds me, what you just said, of one of my favorite proofreading errors I found in a book one time. Why do they miss one? It was a table, and it was supposed to say “adenocarcinoma” in this particular place, but it said “had no carcinoma.”

(both laughing)

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:43:35.4

Yeah. The slip between the written and the spoken. That’s so funny. What about neuro-oncology? Or, I’m sorry, [OncoLog](#) is what I was going to ask about.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:43:53.5

That’s a newsletter. That was started in the ‘50s. Evolved over time. I guess I should be proud of that, too, because in the mid ‘90s, when MD Anderson had its economic crisis, we were losing a couple of staff. I didn’t think it was right to continue to do this newsletter without explicit support from the institution, which, again, we were basically doing out of our hide. People didn’t three or four issues a year, then another time. Sometimes it was really good, but sometimes it was nothing. And so, basically, I put together a proposal after talking to a lot of different people in marketing and among the physicians, and so on. Either pay for this twelve times a year with a real designer and an editor in charge, or let’s just kick it out. Let’s get rid of it. If we don’t want it, let’s get rid of it. Let’s not pretend that we have a physicians’ newsletter. Let’s have one or not have one. And they did fund it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:45:12.4

And just for the record, can you tell me what the mission of this publication is, *OncoLog*?

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Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:45:20.3

To tell physicians in private practice—well, it's got two missions. It's got an overt mission, which is to tell them what's going on in cancer care at MD Anderson. And its covert mission is to increase referrals from physicians. Or make it easy for them to support their patients who want to refer themselves to MD Anderson.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:45:48.4

And this is in both—still, both in print form and online? Or only online now?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:45:55.3

Yes. Print and online, and also in Spanish translation online.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:46:03.5

And how is it distributed? I mean, well, I'm wondering about the online one. Do people sign up to get it, or is it at a central place?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:46:16.7

Well, it can be transmitted by email. Is that what you mean? I forgot what the delivery is called. Push-serve or something. Or it's just online where you can come get it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:46:31.0

I imagine you would have a thing where people could sign up to get the newsletter, and it pumps out—

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:46:33.9

We do.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:46:34.6

Yeah. Right.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:46:35.0

And I don't know how many people are on that list, to tell you the truth. Thirty thousand for the print, but it's not because they ask to be on the list. We put them on the list.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:46:45.0

Oh, yeah. There you go. There you go. So in the '90s, when this got funded, what was the budget for it? And how did you—why do you think the administration decided to fund it? I think I know the answer to that, but—

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Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:47:03.8

Because they had no other form of communication with physicians who didn't work in academia.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:47:09.2

Yeah. Yeah.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:47:11.6

Because it was—it looked like it could be good.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:47:16.7

And that was also the whole moment when the shift, the change in legislation to allow physician referrals was taking place, too. So it was a natural marketing tool at the same time.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:47:26.7

Well, not to allow physician referral, but to allow self-referral.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:47:29.6

To allow self-referral. That's what I meant. Yeah. Right.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:47:32.9

So, yes. A lot of patients accessed it online. We don't send it to patients, but they access it. And I'm sure because of the level we write it at, which is for physicians in private practice, that many, many, many sophisticated patients find it to be useful. I said "I'm sure." I should know, shouldn't I?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:47:57.5

It seems like it's part of your verbal style. We're almost at four o'clock. And I do have some extra questions to ask. Can we schedule another talk? For like an hour or something like that?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:48:11.2

We can. Sure.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:48:13.2

Okay. That sounds good. So is there anything else that you'd like to add today, before I shut off the recorder?

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:48:22.7

No. I'm here at your command. I'll answer your questions. If I think of something in the meantime that I think you'll want to know, I'll be ready to tell you the next time around.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:48:34.6

That'd be great.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:48:35.9

But I don't feel—the reason I never thought that I would be useful as an interviewee, is I've never been part of the upper structure. I don't know amazing stories about people like Stu Zimmerman knows, or like Steve Stuyck knows. Those people.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:48:54.6

Well, I mean—

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:48:56.8

I know stories about—I know secondhand stories about people, but—

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:49:01.3

Well, but this isn't—this project was never conceived only as an effort to collect amazing stories about people. I think it's also a story about the institution as a person, and to me, this is an extremely interesting place where really important stuff happens. I mean, Scientific Publications. This is the place where stuff turns in to really solid user-friendly information that goes out to the world. And so finding out how that happens and why it happens the way it does and who are the people that work. That, to me, is really important. So to me it was not at all surprising when you popped up on my list of people to come and speak to.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:49:51.2

Well, thank you.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:49:51.3

Well, I thank you very much.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:49:53.9

Thank you, from the department.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:49:54.0

Yes. Absolutely. I thank you very much for your time today, and I look forward to talking to you again.

Mr. Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:49:57.5

Thanks.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:49:58.0

So I'm turning off the recorder at 4 pm.

1:50:02.8 (End of Audio Session 1)

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

Interview Session 2—August 10, 2012

Chapter 00B

Interview Identifier

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:03.2

Okay. I'm Tacey Ann Rosolowski and today is August 10th, and I am in the office of Walter Pagel in Scientific Publications, and we are having our second interview session today. The time is ten minutes after two o'clock. Thank you very much for giving me this time again.

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Chapter 07

B: An Institutional Unit

Reports, Changes in the Field of Scientific Publications, and the Challenges of In-House Publications

Story Codes

- B: Institutional Processes
- A: Definitions, Explanations, Translations
- B: Building/Transforming the Institution
- C: Professional Practice
- C: The Professional at Work
- C: Discovery and Success

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:03.2+

We just came from the hall where there is a timeline set up of Mr. Pagel's work with Scientific Publications since he was hired here in 1974 if I'm remembering—

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:00:35.8

Seventy-one.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:36.5

Seventy-one. And we did that to prompt our respective memories and ideas about what to talk about in this second session, and one of the first things that I noted was work—beginning the work in 1971 on a study called “The Impact of Cancer on Texas” or excuse me, that—

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:01:00.1

That was it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:01.5

Yes, it was “Impact of Cancer on Texas” but I was making the connection that it was very close to the institution of the [National Cancer Act](#) which was in 1971, and I think this study came out in '76, '77?

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:01:12.7

Right.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:13.2

Okay. I wonder if you could talk to me a little bit about that report and its significance and whether it continued after that.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:01:20.6

It was a joint project—MD Anderson and the Texas Department of Health. The notion was to show what the impact of cancer was on Texans by disease site. It was actually a series of graphs—mortality and survival and incidence of the various cancers. They were—actually I shouldn't—I have a book in here. I don't think I do. But there were line graphs and bar graphs of the statistics, and the notion was that's how you showed what the impact was in a very objective fashion. There was a little bit of text but not much. There were three editions of it, the first one in '77, and then probably the last one in the mid '80s, and the statistics I think came from fairly easily gotten databases through the period—statewide databases.

T.A. Rosolowski

0:02:36.4

I was interested in the way you worded that—that you were—it was assumed that the bar graphs were the way that you represented that. Was there sort of an idea that you were trying to figure out how to represent this kind of information for a general audience at the time? That and I was just curious about the word choice you used there.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:02:55.8

I don't know if my word choice meant anything. I think it was really determined by others how that would be represented. It was a pretty standard way to show those things.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:03:06.4

What were the findings and what was the impact of the publication of this report?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:03:14.3

Such hard questions. I actually don't remember. It was too long ago for me. I know that the Commissioner of Health for the state of Texas and Joseph Painter, who was an important Vice

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President when he was here—Vice President for Extramural Affairs—were proud of it and pleased to be able to assemble a report like this. The people in epidemiology/patient studies at the time did most of the data management and statistical work, and our job was simply to oversee production of the volume.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:03:55.4

Why was MD Anderson chosen to spearhead that particular study?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:04:03.8

Well, I don't think there was any other place that called itself a cancer hospital at the time. There are a few around now. We were—though I consider us still the experts. At the time there was no competition whatsoever. We were experts by default. There was nobody else to do it really except the department—Texas Department of Health. They needed people who knew cancer to be part of it. I'm not sure where the impetus for it came from—whether it came from Dr. Painter's office or the Texas Department of Health.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:04:40.4

You said the last one was in the mid '80s, but has there been some other publication started that's taken over the role of gathering that information about cancer in Texas?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:04:55.1

I don't think so. Data management probably has changed in tremendous ways, ways that I'm not so capable of discussing. But in the '70s and '80s, not anybody could get access to the data. It was just sitting in repositories here and there that weren't so freely accessible, whereas now you can turn it up—the data up somewhere. There are people doing research on the impact of various cancers on—or maybe it's the opposite. The impact of various factors on cancer survival or cancer incidence or whatever—based on data that they can access from their offices that's in repositories all over the world. It's just so, so different. You don't have to publish stuff in order to make it accessible to people anymore. I'm thinking that's why it probably just died. It's not needed anymore.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:06:01.3

I was going to ask you how you felt scientific publishing had changed over the course of your time here at MD Anderson, and so now seems like kind of a natural time to slip that question in.

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Part of the databases—what are other kinds of factors that have influenced the changes? And what changes have you seen?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:06:29.3

There are a lot of changes. The main change truthfully is the accessibility of information these days. You don't have to have a printed copy in order to get the information you need. That you can do very focused searches of the data to get just the information you want and not have to bother with information that isn't relevant to the exact thing you're doing at the time. Books have become—for various reasons books have become much less prominent in the biomedical field. That's not true of other academic fields, but in the biomedical field they're viewed as just practically un-useful unless they're in—if they're intended for academic audiences because they have access to the latest journal publications just like that. They don't have to subscribe to every journal that they want information from or go to the library and pull a journal off the shelf and look at it. They can do it all from their offices. It's just too easy now. There's not much point in collecting intellectual ideas in a book that are outdated within a year anyway. That's one of the ways.

I see the accessibility of data as a mixed benefit. I think I have hinted at that to you earlier. I don't know if the recording was on then but the day of the browser—the person who looks beyond what they know they need—is exceptional these days. Those people actually turn out to be the most successful people because they can bring new directions to their research, but the habit is to have in place search queries that return you only the information you're looking for, and those things can be in place so that the information comes to you as soon as it's published. So I'm presuming this because I'm not a scientist myself, but I presume that one's vision gets very narrowed after a while. I know of a few faculty that are—I mean there are lots of successful faculty, but I know well a few faculty who are successful because they are looking everywhere. They're not just looking at their little slice of the pie. They're looking to see if there's something going on somewhere else that could be—is or could be related to what they are doing.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:09:09.9

Do you feel comfortable giving me an example of someone?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:09:13.7

I do. Gigi Lozano has worked in the area of p53 since her post-doctoral fellowship with Arnold Levine—I think at Princeton—and thinks always about what else is going on that could affect understanding of how p53 controls or is involved with what they call the master switch in the cell cycle.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:09:42.8

The tumor-suppressor gene.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:09:44.9

Yes that. But the way it does it is through the control of the cell cycle, so there are many other factors that affect it. There are many other diseases that it might be involved in. She's always paying attention. She's always deliberately paying attention to who's doing what somewhere else, and she's in their laps as soon as she hears something that she thinks possibly could be related to what she's doing, and they're in her lap because they know that she's interested.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:10:15.6

And how have you seen that awareness yield a result in her productivity, her career, her writing?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:10:27.7

She has been published in *Science and Cell* and [*Proceedings of the National Academy*](#) and so on. Those are one measure. Her grant proposals get very high ranks. I think it's—to be honest I think it's because people know that she's paying attention everywhere. She's not just taking a little slice out of the pie. No matter what she reports they know that—she says she's going to do they know that she's going to be paying so much attention to everything else that if something more valuable to the granting agency comes up she's going to pursue that, and they're going to trust her judgment in pursuit of it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:11:02.9

Wow.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:11:03.3

It's very interesting to me actually. There are lots of—no. I'm going too far here. But anyway, there's lots of advice about how to write a grant proposal, and we know it and we use it. The people who don't have her kind of reputation really need that kind of approach to grant writing, but because the scope of her thinking about her field is so broad and yet can switch so quickly, I don't think people hold her to that same standard. They hold her to a different standard that is really more productive, frankly. In fact, she's been a member of many of the panel discussions I've organized over the years, and the most recent one she gave was on grant writing—the strategies for grant writing that went beyond just choosing—went beyond—I don't even

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remember what it went beyond. But anyway, her single, most important piece of advice was that if you are still working on the last aim—if you haven't changed the last aim in your grant by year five, you are not going to be re-funded. Meaning if your work has not evolved beyond what you said it was going to be in your original grant proposal, then you're doomed when you submit a competitive renewal.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:12:43.4

Is that a surprise to audiences? To researchers?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:12:48.9

I don't know.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:12:50.9

I just could imagine that that would be kind of scary. It really makes people feel—it puts the pressure on.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:13:01.5

Well, I'll bet you she wouldn't say that. I'll bet she would say, "This keeps me interested in what I'm doing." And surely somebody who sets out a five-year plan—which is what you're doing in a grant proposal—if they are still working on exactly what they said they were going to be working on by year five has gotten bored with it in a way.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:13:25.1

I read someplace that creative temperaments reorganize themselves every seven years and it's kind of sounding like that. With innovative thinking—that's what feeds an innovative thinker is moving beyond, moving beyond. People can get in—people who don't live in that place can hang on to habit, and that's security for them. But it sounds like at least for the granting agencies they really are responding to someone who is on the cutting edge and lives in that innovative place.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:14:00.9

Innovation is the number one—there are five criteria by which they evaluate grants and best as I can tell innovation is number one—realistic innovation not wild thinking but realistic innovation.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:14:14.9

What are some other ways that the arena of publishing has changed over the course of your career?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:14:23.7

No more hot type.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:14:29.4

I don't even know what that word—I don't even know what that word means.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:14:33.1

It was a lead—pieces of lead with letters on the end of it. It was inked and pressed into another piece of paper so computerized typesetting and page layout and negative creation and printing—

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:14:52.5

What's negative creation?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:14:53.7

I don't know. I've gone beyond what I really know about production other than to tell you that a—some sort of image of the page is created that can be used in printing machines. I don't know that you would call them presses.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:15:10.9

The actual creation of the final product—

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:15:13.8

It's all on the computer now.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:15:15.1

It's all on the computer now. Yeah. Yep.

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:15:17.6

It's no surprise today, but twenty years ago it would have been just an unbelievable innovation.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:15:27.2

What about the economics of publishing in-house? We spoke briefly when we were looking at the timeline about molecular carcinogenesis, which was an initiative that you encouraged a colleague to take up I believe in 1988, and that was an in-house publication, and I'm talking about the financial viability of that for a department such as this. Has that been a—maybe you could talk about that publication, and then we could talk about the economics of it.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:16:09.0

First of all, I'm not—I'm a publisher in a sense, but I'm not a publisher in the sense that I understand the full dimensions of finance that go into this—the revenue-generated revenue stream, how your expenses have to be related to what you can expect the revenue stream—I don't know any of that stuff. The notion that you would take on a publishing project that hadn't earned its keep and more for us was pretty big, and the more we worked on doing it ourselves the more we realized we didn't know. The biggest problem there is that you're taking the risk when you self-publish; whereas if a publisher takes it on, they're taking the risk and you're not, so you set up a contract in a way that gives you certain amounts of money for doing the work. You're not going to make the big profit either, but an institution like this is—at least in those days was not out to make big profits on projects like this.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:17:11.8

Tell me about [Molecular Carcinogenesis](#) though. How did it get started as being part of this department?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:17:18.9

A woman in my department decided that the way we could have the best connections with faculty was to work on very important projects for them, and those would be journals. If we had the editor-in-chief of a journal on staff here and we worked closely with them, we will become known for this kind of work and that would be important, she thought. And she had a friend who worked in the area of carcinogenesis—that is investigations of how normal cells become eventually cancerous cells and what the factors that change those are. What are the external factors? What are the internal and molecular factors? The director of Science Park at the time named Tom Slaga was interested in being—in assuming the editor-in-chief role. He had a

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reputation in the country so that was a good thing—that a journal could have a great—a well-known scientist at its helm and the other person was Stuart Yuspa at the National Cancer Institute. Y-U-S-P-A, and between the two of them and Carol Cohn—who was the woman who had the idea—they came up with a list of potential board members, which you have to have for a journal, and went about the process of inviting them and telling them—working out what the journal would look like and what its goals were and what its scope was, and so on, and so forth.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:19:06.5

How many issues went to press?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:19:11.4

Eventually or when?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:19:13.4

Before—well, because you were telling me that it got turned over to another publisher, and I'm wondering how many were published in-house before that happened.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:19:23.2

I'm thinking just two or three.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:19:24.1

Oh, really? Really? What handwriting was on the wall about that?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:19:28.1

Money.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:19:29.3

Money. Okay.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:19:29.9

It was all about money and how we didn't know how to make it be sure that it made money. We were—we got a grant from the institution of \$125,000, but that wasn't going to carry us very

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long we realized fairly quickly, and the institution does not expect to give you another \$125,000 and another \$125,000 until you finally learn what you're doing and make money.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:20:05.1

What institution did it get turned over to?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:20:07.8

It got turned over to a company called Wiley-Liss. W-I-L-E-Y-hyphen-L-I-S-S.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:20:18.9

Oh, okay. Do you feel that it's a handicap or do you think that an institution like MD Anderson should have a journal that it—or a journal series that it's publishing for the sake of its reputation?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:20:37.9

I certainly once would have thought that, and there once was one called *The Cancer Bulletin*. But again, the same revolution—the revolution that gives us all kinds of information available to anybody at anytime from anywhere practically and makes it easily accessible and easily sortable—makes the institutional journals less and less valuable. They essentially re-digest what is known into new pieces through the perspective of their experts, but what's available to the professional audience that wants that kind of information are the articles written by the people who made the discoveries. Unless you're a generalist—which there are fewer and fewer of—you don't need that kind of magazine anymore. I'm not sure I answered your question.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:21:39.8

I think you did. I think you did.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:21:42.0

Even *Molecular Carcinogenesis* was not an institutional publication. It never would have succeeded had it been one. It had to be a publication with an international editorial board. It had to have submissions from scientists all over the world. It had to have people from all over the world making judgments about what kind of articles got published. If they were all MD Anderson people, people would not—people at Memorial Sloan-Kettering would have gotten no credit for submitting to an MD Anderson journal. That would have been meaningless to them—to their promotion-tenure committees. Even the people at MD Anderson who got their stuff

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published in an MD Anderson journal—they would have gotten nothing as far as their CV goes. It just is meaningless when it's your own thing. Am I talking too loud?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:22:33.1

No.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:22:33.5

My wife says I've been talking too loud lately.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:22:37.4

My machine says no.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:22:38.4

Okay.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:22:41.4

And we know, you know, the machine—

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:22:43.6

The machine never lies. Right.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:22:44.5

The machine never lies. That's right. I wanted to ask you—we talked briefly about the fact that the office of science—or the Department of Scientific Publications used to produce the general report, which is now the annual report, but it's worked on by another part of the institution. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that responsibility that the department had and why it got turned over and what the challenges were in it.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:23:18.5

The challenges were to get people from all over the institution to produce material that you could use, to write chapters that you could alter enough to make them useful. People over time have gotten less and less willing to write reports to your standards for your publication, for

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institutional publications. It's harder and harder to get people to do things on time. It leads you to examine more and more carefully why you're doing this, making you wonder why you're essentially hounding all these people to do something to put in a book that you're—you begin to wonder if it actually has the use, a use, a good use, a use that's equivalent to the effort you're making the institution go through and the cost of producing the publication. So these kinds of publications just get sent everywhere, but you have your doubts. I mean, who the heck wants—I don't know if this is good for a recording—but who the heck wants to open the general report of MD Anderson Cancer Center?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:24:31.0

I was going to ask you what was the purpose—what was the intended purpose of the report, and who was the audience for it?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:24:39.4

The audience probably was people who wanted to read the general report.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:24:46.5

And what was in the general report?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:24:48.6

Stuff. Stories about departments and what they—what their missions were and possibly a little bit about what they accomplished and a few photographs and a bit of statistics. And it just didn't fit the world today. It was important back in the days when MD Anderson was a young institution and needed to show that it was of the same caliber as other great institutions or eventually better we hope, we think. But once people were no longer wondering whether MD Anderson was of good caliber probably, the thing probably should have stopped. So now public affairs does an annual report, and you must—if you're a state-run institution you need to report to the citizens of Texas what you've done with their money and to your donors what you've done with their money, but that's not what the general report tried to do. I'm sure it had that secondary purpose, but it's too big, it's too dense—or it was too big and it was too dense for those purposes really, so the one public affairs produces is much shorter, is written by them, by journalists who know how to capture people's interests and know when to stop talking.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:26:10.7

Yeah, I've had a look at it actually. It's pretty good reading. Yep. What—did you learn any new

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lessons as an editor from working on the general report during those years?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:26:24.9

No. How hard it was to get people to do things they didn't want to do. I imagine I learned to think more carefully about audience, and I imagine that I didn't—I don't remember anymore, but I imagine I did not undertake some projects I realized had an indefinite or undescribed or vague audience that I could tell this publication wasn't going to meet their needs.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:26:57.6

And probably an outdated purpose, too.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:26:59.4

Yeah.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:27:00.8

Yeah. When was the last—do you remember about the time when you stopped working on the *General Report*?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:27:05.4

I don't but I'm guessing 1990.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:27:10.5

Okay.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:27:10.8

It might have been earlier.

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Chapter 08

B: An Institutional Unit

Offering Support for MD Anderson Writers

Story Codes

B: Institutional Processes
B: Building/Transforming the Institution
C: Professional Practice
C: The Professional at Work

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:27:14.3

I noticed too from that timeline the words into print publication—that you—ooh, you're reaching for something here. Here it is. Wow! *The Handbook of Services*, Department of Scientific Publications. Can you tell for the benefit of the recording device what this was?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:27:35.5

Our department felt the need to describe what we did in ways that would appeal to our primary clients who were the faculty and trainees of the institution who wanted to publish primarily in the journals—in biomedical research journals, so we did a little something that told people what we did. Well, we began to realize that the best way to publicize your ability to help people was to tell them something they needed to know, not something you wanted them to know, and so the next issue or version to print was more about how to write articles, how to write good grant proposals.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:28:26.8

And when did this one come out?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:28:28.4

I don't know but there's a date in there somewhere.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:28:30.1

I'll have to look. Oh, 1983. And then reprinted 1992. Second edition 1992.

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:28:44.5

Here's the third edition. We decided to be slick.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:28:49.0

Look at this. Yeah. Ooh, I like your translucent front page there. And how come you decided to go slick?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:28:56.8

So people wouldn't think we were old-fashioned. So people would think that we were modern.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:29:01.6

Are you?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:29:02.7

Sure.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:29:11.4

Yeah, well you've upgraded typeface and—so who did the design for this—the layout?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:29:17.7

Actually somebody on staff was the primary designer, worked with a print designer at the UT print shop. But she had a kind of vision that I liked; others not so much, but I did.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:29:40.9

What did you like about her vision?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:29:46.6

It was attention getting.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:29:52.4

It is. It's a nice object. I like the silvery front cover. It all visually relates really well. Why did other people not like it so much?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:30:05.8

It's attention getting.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:30:11.0

Who was the staff member whose vision resulted in that?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:30:20.4

Her name was Julie Starr. Two R's.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:30:32.6

The interviewer probably isn't supposed to vote, but I vote for that one, too. And was there any—were there any—was there any tweaking to the content?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:30:44.9

Some. Yeah, we learn more every year we work. So, we learned more about how to write a good this or that and those changes showed up in there. We now know even more, and that—this has got to be at least ten years old.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:31:03.5

You said 2000?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:31:04.7

In 2000, okay, so it's twelve years old, and we haven't done anything since. We now think that a single volume would not be as useful as dividing it up into pieces—journal articles, grant proposals—because we know so much more about each of those and because the desire to know about those things happens when you're ready to write this or ready to write that and so—I don't know. We haven't sat down to talk about it, but presumably it would be set up in a way that a person could actually see a template of what to do and use it right then when they're writing it.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:31:50.5

Interesting. So really addressing kind of process issues as well as content. Very neat. Is that something—is that a discussion you're hoping to initiate before you retire?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:32:06.2

No. No time.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:32:08.0

Leave that for others?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:32:09.1

Yes. They're already thinking about it. It's just we have a lot of different things we want to do, and where does that fall on that list? Maybe not too terribly high. We're doing classes. We teach people how to write in a sense that most don't understand. That's not—when people think you're teaching them how to write, they think you're teaching them how to write sentences and paragraphs, but that is not what we're doing. We're doing just what I said, which is teaching them what the template of the conventional reader expect—meets the needs of conventional readers. Expectations of conventional readers I should say; readers who expect your article to match the conventions of the field. That's probably the best way to say it. So this book—if we did a book that I described—would be really a complement to our workshops we already do. We don't have to do this book in order to have the effect we want to have.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:33:21.7

From the beginning when you were talking about—I remember when we started the conversation about guidelines. The way you told the story it was like a feedback loop. The guidelines were in production, then you started teaching, then the teaching started to help the guidelines crystallize, and it sounds like that is still going on.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:33:40.3

Right.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:33:41.1

Yeah. So it's an interesting process. Where do you see—is there a new direction? Or in what direction do you see your classes going in the near future? Are they evolving in a certain way?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:33:58.2

They are evolving but not rapidly and I think we—this sounds complacent but I think that we hit the nail on the head when we designed it in the first place, and the revisions that have occurred since are that we—this and that wasn't as clear as it should be. This and that—we could have better examples of that. We maybe should teach this part before that part. Not important changes. The most important thing we did I can't imagine us—sitting here I can't imagine us deciding that we should take a different direction than the one we took.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:34:44.9

I asked you how it was funded in the beginning and you said you were kind of doing it by the seat of your pants—I think was the phrase you used—and I'm wondering, is that still the case? Does the teaching have funding at this point?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:35:02.8

Teaching have funding.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:35:04.5

These classes that you do.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:35:05.8

We have some positions that are identified for the education program. They don't begin to cover all the resources we have to use in order to teach, but they make it easier for the teachers to do the work. So, yes, it's funded. But we still have to do a little bit—our other work is still affected, but I don't think that's something exceptional or unusual in this institution or maybe any institution. If you take on a new initiative, you're likely to have to use resources that you already have on hand, and you're not likely to get the funding to have—to pay for all the work that you have to do in order to do that project.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:36:00.5

So, you don't—

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:36:00.8

I doubt that the Historical Resources Center is one-hundred percent funded by new funds. Much of the library has had to carve out—Stephanie the head librarian has to carve out some extra time out of their time. Probably the Internet—the electronic support comes out of people they already had. They love doing it but nevertheless it is people who already had full-time jobs now had to devote some of their energy to a new project.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:36:32.4

So you don't—from what I'm seeing is that you don't interpret the fact that the funding—the given doesn't fully cover the teaching as a lack of—indication of lack of support by the institution.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:36:48.2

No. Do I wish they'd give us more? Yes. Do I think they should give us more? Yes. Do we ask for it every year? Yes. Do I think when they don't give it to us that they think we're wasting our time? No. I know they don't think we're wasting our time.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:37:05.9

Yeah, it's just political, financial reality.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:37:08.4

Yeah. It's all getting it to balance. Would I make the same decisions they did? No, but—

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:37:20.5

Is there anything else you want to say about the teaching at this point? The teaching that Scientific Publications does?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:37:28.1

No, I know I said some things the last time, and I don't think I have new things to say. It's a source of great pride. Editors—I don't know if I want to publicly categorize them this way, but I think that they would accept the notion that for the most part they're introverts and not thought of as the sorts of people who would stand up in front of scientists who are world-class thinkers

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and tell them a way that they can write better in a way that's authoritative enough for the audience to feel like they were getting valid information. I doubt that—I'm certain, in fact, that from the beginning there were huge doubts about whether they could pull it off, and I think that they have come to see—with time and practice and training—that they can hold their own in that situation.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:38:38.0

And you feel that and it sounds like there's an ethos in Scientific Publications that everybody who participates in the teaching kind of feels the same way, that there's—this department lends the weight of that sort of confidence or authority that they can speak to scientists in that way.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:38:56.2

I don't know. I think that maybe this is more related to the fact that what we do every day, day in and day out—which is to edit—gives us an insight and a familiarity that very few others could bring to something like this and we realize that. I know we can't tell them how to do their experiments, but yes, we can tell them how to describe them and how to—once we know what they think is the importance of their experiments we can tell them—give them advice about how to construct a logical, powerful, and convincing argument for the importance of this work.

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Chapter 09

A: Contributions

Strengthening Biomedical Editing Nationwide and Within MD Anderson

Story Codes

B: Building/Transforming the Institution
A: The Administrator
A: The Educator
A: Activities Outside Institution
A: Career and Accomplishments
B: Institutional Processes

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:39:43.5

That's neat. A couple of other things I wanted to ask you about here. In 1988 through '90 you were on the Board of Directors of the American Medical Writers Association, and it looks like you have a continuing role with them.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:40:01.1

I do not.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:40:02.2

Okay. But it endured for a little bit.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:40:04.6

A little bit. I think it's the local chapter, frankly.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

Oh, okay. I thought there were two—I thought I read that there were two—but you correct me. What was your role and what was the organization?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:40:15.7

The local chapter of the American Medical Writers Association—I say local. It's the southwest chapter and covers parts of New Mexico and Texas, and I simply was a member of the board. I was not a big-time officer. The place that I had the greatest impact on a national organization

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was in the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences. It said on that timeline that I was one of the charter members of the group, and in fact, what it doesn't say on the timeline was that I was the Chairman of the Certification Examination Development Committee.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:40:49.1

What does that mean?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:40:50.2

That means I got a bunch of people together. We learned how to write test questions that were fair and valid and correct, and we wrote 200 test questions and tested them with real people doing real work and narrowed them down to 150, and now there's an exam given four to six times a year all over the world to give editors the opportunity to show that they have the fundamental skills necessary to edit biomedical or scientific manuscripts.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:41:31.4

Can you give me the name of that—it's the Certification Development—what was the name of the committee that you were on?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:41:38.1

Certification Examination Development Committee.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:41:42.3

Thank you.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:41:44.9

I suppose you should put the editor in front of that—editorial or something like that.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:41:49.4

And when was that?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:41:51.9

That happened—it started happening in the late '80s. I was invited to join the first committee

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that was developing a test for an organization called the [Council of Biology Editors](#). I was told that if I would work with them one or two years I would have discharged my obligation and it's now—I think it's twenty-two years later I have finally ended my last position of that of Appeals Secretary for the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:42:29.2

Why did you feel it was so important to get involved with those initiatives?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:42:40.0

You will laugh perhaps, but I felt that I could do it and therefore I should. Not because I thought the world was dying to have a certification examination, but there was a group of people—editors who thought, and I had thought this too—that there were many, many people claiming to be editors who didn't know what they were doing. And there were many people who were hiring editors who didn't know what editors should be doing or should know or anything like that. And though I didn't feel some altruistic need to help editors prove they knew what they were doing or help people hiring them to know who they were hiring, I felt an obligation to these people who felt an obligation, and that obligation arose simply because I felt I could do it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:43:40.9

But it sounds like it made a big impact.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:43:42.9

I think it did.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:43:45.0

How does it work now? An individual takes this test, and they get a certification from the Board of Editors of the Life Sciences?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:43:59.8

Right.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:44:00.3

Okay. And so that—it's not a necessary thing but it's certainly something that puts you—it makes you head of the pack.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:44:06.0

Exactly.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:44:08.6

How many editors in the US do you think take that test? Or how many individuals who are interested in editorial jobs take that test?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:44:20.5

I'm trying to remember because there are statistics and I'm thinking something like 200 a year. And I believe we already have some very large number—close to 1,000—who are certified. It seems large. Maybe it's not. It doesn't seem large, but that's—these are biomedical or science editors. There are organizations that want you to be certified in order for you to be hired. And then of course there are other people who are more interested in you if you are certified.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:44:56.2

I imagine it may make a difference in salary and all kinds of things.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:45:00.4

I don't know. Never our intention and I don't know. This organization—the Department of Scientific Publications doesn't really need the certification to determine whether a person should join our staff because we have our own sets of tests.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:45:16.5

Interesting. What sorts of tests are they?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:45:22.5

One is grammar—a pretty sophisticated grammar test. We're just looking to see if somebody knows something, and it's surprising the number of people who call themselves editors who

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don't know what we want them to know. And then there are a series of tests of things like abstract reasoning and—I don't remember what the others are because I didn't really do them, invent them, or work with organization and development here at HR to develop them, and really it's not so much develop them as select which ones and set the cut scores based on experience with the staff at the time we developed them.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:46:23.5

One thing we didn't talk about with [The Write Stuff](#)—or actually, no we haven't talked about that. I caught the mistake and—I hadn't asked you yet about that online newsletter.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:46:34.3

The Write Stuff?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:46:35.4

The Write Stuff. Yeah. And I wanted—this kind of goes back to the online publishing as I understand is that it was part of the training program?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:46:45.1

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:46:45.8

Could you tell me a little bit about that?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:46:47.4

The original idea was that we would help a community of writers stay together. It really hasn't worked out that way so much as we've just tried to keep the people who have taken our courses up-to-date on developments, or give them new ways of looking at writing, or give them new tips that they might use, and so on. I think it's once a quarter, so the people here in the department come up with the ideas and then write—research and write the articles. And they're short. But I think they're good. They're well-written, and they got—it's sent to graduates mainly and a few other people that know about it.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:47:33.8

But it was originally you said to try to sustain a community of writers? That's always such a tricky thing to do.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:47:40.4

They have so much else to do they don't have time to be in a community of writers. They are already in the community of science.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:47:45.6

Right. Yeah.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:47:46.5

They don't have time for another community.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:47:48.1

Yeah. It's too bad though because having a community of writers can really be helpful in the whole process.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:47:56.4

Well, maybe if we worked harder maybe it would come to pass.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:47:59.4

No, I wasn't saying if—it's just a reality of people's time, you know. It is, but I know being a writer myself, it's really nice to have that—have sounding boards, but it's just how many hours in the day do you have to sit at the computer and sustain those connections? One of the reasons that we know each other outside of this interview is because you sit on the Historical Resources Center's steering committee, and I wanted to ask you about that. I also wanted to ask a broader question related to—I'm sure you've sat on many other committees that I don't know about, and so I have a couple of questions. One is how you got involved with the steering committee, but then the other question is—other initiatives that you've taken part in that maybe aren't directly related to Scientific Publications but how important you feel it is that Scientific Publications is represented on a variety of initiatives that have been—that are undertaken at the institution. So that's sort of the big area in which I want the question to move. So maybe first let's start with

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how you got connected up with the Historical Resources Center and why you felt that was important and important for Scientific Publications to be a part of.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:49:27.9

There are so many assumptions in what you say that are—

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:49:32.5

Okay. Slap my hand.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:49:33.0

No, it's okay. It'd be the assumptions that anybody would have, which is that there was some purpose, there was some guiding light behind all of this and there usually wasn't. It was—here's a circumstance, somebody invited me. If I think I can do something, I'll do it. But in this particular instance, this department before my time—ten years before my time, fifteen years before my time—wrote *The First Twenty Years*, which is the first history of MD Anderson. It was interesting. It was just anecdotal. It was a collection for the most part—a huge collection of interesting anecdotes that people who love MD Anderson would want to read. There was to be another history and this department—the leaders of this department who wished to include me at that time—were involved in trying to shepherd that history by getting various departments in the institution to write their own histories. That was a miserable failure. Many departments didn't want to write them. None of them was—not one history matched anything about another department's history. It was why—what kind of thing is going to result from this? *The First Twenty Years* has a consistent editorial voice. It may not be great public history, but it was consistent. This one would have been pure misery to try to shape into a coherent piece. People kept taking it up and trying to fix it and so on, and sometimes they were people in this department and sometimes not. Anyway, the point is the department became associated with the history, and so when it was decided finally that we really would have a real history I was the natural person to ask to be a member of the committee. Not me personally but the Director of Scientific Publications.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:51:35.9

What input did you feel you could and did make to shaping the—and that resulted of course in James Olson's book, *Making Cancer History*—and what was the particular impact that you felt you brought to the table?

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:51:55.5

I think we kind of had like minds—the first members of that committee, especially Steve Tomasovic [Oral History Interview], Steve Stuyck [Oral History Interview], and me, and Mary Jane [Schier]—which was that the history should not be another sort of inward-looking history like *The First Twenty Years* was—of kind of taking MD Anderson in isolation from the world and talking about it; that it should be—that it should have a context that was related to cancer, to medicine, to Texas, to the United States. It shouldn't interact with the history of those regions. It should be a real history. It should put it in its place in the world, and I had something to do with articulating that and helping make sure—I think that—I don't—I think it might have gone—probably would have gone the same way had I never been there, but sometimes I was able to say it in a way that helped others see it in the same way I was. The history itself—there are other histories in this medical center of various institutions that are miserable little pieces of puff. If you read—if you work in those institutions and you don't think, right—you think they're great. If you don't work in them and you read them you think, 'who cares?' And we didn't want a book that said, 'but who cares.' And so I think I'm pretty attuned to what a book and its—how a book and its audience should match and so we had a couple of people—probably you've seen them. I think they—a couple of people who got the—who appeared to get the first contract but they were public historians of the most puffery kind. They had credentials, but their products were just nothing but laudatory junk, and we wanted a couple of awards—maybe not all awards but a couple of awards to show, to make it seem real not fake; not something you just put in a time capsule and store away for people 100 years from now to think that you were a wonderful place—but to have historians pick up the book and so on and so forth.

So we—not only I but Steve Stuyck and Tomasovic and Mary Jane—thought that those first couple of people were just not going to produce the book we wanted. Even though we came this close to hiring them, we were so grateful that we didn't. And the good fortune—we didn't know how because we booked a lot of—we sent out an RFA, we got a few applications. We picked what we thought was the best one. We were extremely disappointed that the best one wasn't any better than it was. Olson did not submit an application, but Steve Stuyck remembered him from the past. I don't know just how he remembered him; I just know he did—that he was a historian, that he had been treated at MD Anderson, that he worked with Sam Houston [State], and so Steve made a connection with him and basically persuaded him to be the historian for the group.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:55:32.4

Now, in between publication of *Making Cancer History* and kind of the re-start of the oral history project—your formal re-start of the Oral History Project a year ago—what did the Historical Resources Center's steering committee do during that time? What projects did you work on?

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:55:58.0

I'm not sure we had any except to try to make sure that the oldest faculty got talked to before they died.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:56:06.4

Yeah. Well, which is always a key thing with an oral history. Absolutely. Yeah. What are—when you began talking about really re-starting the Oral History Project, what were your—and what are—your particular hopes for it? What do you want the—which purpose do you want it to serve?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:56:38.0

There you go again—thinking I have a purpose.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:56:47.3

You don't have hopes for it?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:56:49.7

Well, I hope it's done well. I hope the people access it. I hope the people learn things about MD Anderson. I hope they learn about the individuals who made up this place who are really what made it great. The individuals were more important to the institution in its early years than they are now. The institution has a certain—a momentum all its own that is less able to be shifted by individuals than it would before. We were—I don't know how that's an answer to your question, but to what did I think the purpose of the Oral History Project is—but even though that's the case, I think people still want to know about the movers and shakers of an institution, and they want to hear what they have to say maybe twenty years from now. I doubt that the early pioneers at this place ever thought about others reading their histories twenty years in the future. They just thought about the problems they had in the face of that. And so we could say that even today when someone like me doesn't see the purpose personally—they don't actually see why anyone would want to know what Scientific Publications did other than the people who are working with them now—that could very well be different twenty years from now, and who's to say? And so if it's not here you can't look at it. And if it is here—or listen to it—and if it is, you can.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:58:31.3

Yeah, and I think I understand when you say that the individuals may have been more important in the past when MD Anderson was smaller because it's almost as if the ripple effect around each other individual is easier to see. Today, when the institution is so huge, it's more difficult. We talked about this last time during the session, and pretty much everybody that I've talked to for the project who's been here for any length of time has talked about how interactions are less face-to-face, there's more virtual—there's just a sense that individuals have less network. Almost with an oral history you could kind of turn it around and say it's almost as if capturing the individual voices in those situations is even more important because everybody I've spoken to who knows R. Lee Clark speaks at length about him whereas individuals who've come in later—they may have a smaller, more specialized field of influence, and it's even more important to capture who they are and what their passion is and what their stories are and what drove them and—

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:59:36.6

Good point. Yeah, good point.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:59:40.8

It's a very neat process.

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Chapter 10

A: The Administrator

Initiatives and Committees

Story Codes

B: Building/Transforming the Institution
D: On Research and Researchers
A: The Administrator
A: The Educator
A: Activities Outside Institution
A: Career and Accomplishments
B: Institutional Processes

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

0:59:43.1

I have just about finished setting up a panel discussion with faculty. I have a particular way I do it always which is to call someone and say we've got someone who I think has something to say about it so we've got our—we've got something we think. I'd like to know more about it in order to help people with this in here. What can you tell me? What do you think is relevant in your own success in this area—whatever it is? And I'd talk and talk for fifteen, twenty minutes with this person, and then I'd call another one and do the same thing. I don't have quite as structured an interview as you do, but generally speaking I'm looking for the same things from every person. I get a set of notes. I look at them. I usually already know who I want to be on the panel by then. Who can people understand? Who speaks clearly enough to be understood? And who has something to say that's useful? And what I find is that everybody has something to say that's useful, so it becomes almost like who's available on this day at noon? But it is interesting that everybody has stories about their own lives, their own careers in relation to a particular problem that is useful to other people who are trying to get a start or trying to succeed in that particular area.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:01:13.0

What is this panel discussion? Is it a series?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:01:16.2

No. It's just now and then we say, "You know—people want to know."

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:01:21.5

What are some of the topics you've explored?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:01:24.7

Publishing strategies—that is how to figure out when you have enough information to submit it for publication or when ought you to submit it. Is it entirely related to finishing the experiments or is it related to some other factors that you have under consideration? I've told you about the grant one, the session one—grant strategies really. One of the people at that panel talked about how to respond to the review sheets. Another one talked about how to be—how to not spend your time trying to impress people but to try to make it as clear as you can with the simplest sentences you can think of, which is hard for an academician to do. I've probably done five panels, but at the moment I don't remember the others.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:02:31.0

That's okay. I just—it's kind of interesting because I heard a new phrase when I was—I can't remember who I was speaking with actually. It was called target mentoring, and it's the idea that people are so busy now that the traditional mentoring relationship of coming into somebody's office at the end of the day and sitting down and having a conversation and then going for a beer and continuing that conversation—that's gone. So, now people have to have very clear needs. I need help with this, and so I'm going to go and ask specifically for this from a mentor. It's just a funny phrase, but it's capturing a very real phenomenon. It's not exactly what you're doing but it sounds like there's a need in the air, and it's very specific. And so you're getting people together to have a conversation about this particular educational need.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:03:29.5

The one I'm doing now—I didn't say the one I'm doing now, which is what do people who have succeeded in—what are the—what do people who have published in high-impact journals—and that's a very specific an objective—objectively determined set of journals—what will they say allows—were the keys to their success? Because the belief now among the faculty—and nobody has contradicted this belief when I mention it—is that unless you're publishing in high-impact journals you might as well not be publishing according to the thinking of the leaders of the institution who are in charge of promotion and tenure. I have to believe that they would be surprised that they would give—if I said that that's—is that what you think, they would probably—why am I saying all this? They would probably say that isn't really what we think. But all the faculty people—what they see is the action. They don't care what you say. What they see is that the people who get in high-impact—get published in high-impact journals get the

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praise, the promotions, the glory. The people who publish in even the highest-impact journal in their field—but not objectively speaking by these terms a high-impact journal—they don't get anything except a notch on their gun. Not a very big notch, just the same notch as all their other notches. So, there was a group of faculty that approached me with this. I wanted to talk to them. They have this sense that how you write it is the determining factor but nobody—I don't think anybody would say that's the main thing. It is one of the things, and perhaps the second or third most important aspect of getting published in high-impact journals. People want it to be something you can learn to do separate from your science, but the truth is somewhere else like it's part and parcel of your science.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:05:49.0

Yeah. But it's interesting that the faculty felt that they could come and make that request of you. It shows there's a relationship there kind of back-and-forth. They know that that's an instance in which they know they can come to Scientific Publications and get something that they need satisfied.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:06:08.1

Well, actually what happened here is that because they thought it was about writing—that's why they came to me. And I had to first dissuade them from the notion that it was about writing.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:06:20.3

And what did you tell them?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:06:22.9

Well, Greg Pratt and I actually did it, and Greg did a little session on high-impact journals and how to make judgments about various journals and how to find the ones that are high-impact in a certain area—or the highest impact in an area you're trying to publish in. And I did talk some about what you have to do to write something that already would get in, but there's science that deserves to be published in high-impact journals but doesn't get written about well enough to make it, and there's some that does get written about well enough to make it. I don't know what I did to—there was a lot of kind of hostility toward the notion that they should be held to this criterion, and there perhaps was a desire for me to say, you're right. It's a bad thing. But what they really need to do is figure out how they can do it. One of the people I talked to almost every—all the people I called I prefaced it with this dismay. I didn't tell them which group of faculty but I told them it was a group of faculty that approached me, and they were—they had come to discover that nobody cared unless they published in high-impact journals, and they

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wanted some ideas for how to do that. And one of the ones that I called said, “Well, you know I have that same resentment too, and I don’t think it’s right. But it is what it is.” He was one of—of course, I only called people who had published in high-impact journals.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:08:22.3

Who were some of the people that you called?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:08:24.5

Hmm. Oh, this isn’t something you’re going to publish, right? Well, I’ve—

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:08:28.5

Well, it’ll be on—it’ll be online, but—I mean it’s just that they took part in the presentation, I thought. If you’d prefer not to say, that’s fine.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:08:36.8

First of all, I have to say that these are not the only successful people. These are the people I called. I called Chen Dong. I called Anil Sood. I called Michelle Barton. I called Sharon Dent.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:08:57.8

And were they pretty enthusiastic about participating and sharing?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:09:01.3

As it turns out, yes. []

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:09:38.6

That’s nice that they were willing to give their time to be supportive of other faculty members who are trying to meet that bar.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:09:48.2

They’re proud to be able to talk about their success, too. Of course we have to remember that, and I don’t blame them. That’s what I want. I want them to—the main thing I’m going to want them to do is tell the story of the article that got published. I don’t know what I’m going to do

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with Chen Dong who has four.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:10:06.5

Focus. Focus.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:10:09.2

I'm sure he's very focused. I may ask him to pick one of them.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:10:16.8

Are there any other kind of ongoing things in Scientific Publications right now that you're bringing to a close before you retire at the end of the month?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:10:27.8

I need to bring what work I'm doing on the *Cancer Cure* series to a close. That's going to be—it's been determined that my successor is going to get that problem.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:10:44.5

Anything else?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:10:46.8

No, I don't think so. Clean up this office. Get these files put away someplace where somebody can access them. Clean up my electronic files, put them in some place that somebody can find if they want to. Though my own history and the history of other people would say that none of those will ever be looked at. You hate to go through all that work and not have it be accessible at least.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:11:16.3

Right. Were there any other committees that you were a part of? We talked about the Historical Resources Center's steering committee. Were there any other committees that you sat on during your time here? It kind of goes back to my question—it's like Scientific Publications being a presence someplace. I know you said you didn't have a purpose, but the fact that you were there meant that Scientific Publications did affect this—

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:11:42.7

No, I did have a purpose. I just—purpose. I don't know what to say. Actually I learned more—the institution wanted the research report to go online. I think it was Margaret Kripke, but it might have been—I think it was when Fred Becker was the VP for research. The assignment came—well, the executive committee for the science faculty made this decision, and somehow Zimmerman may have been the chairman of that group. I don't know. First of all I should tell you no, I've not served on big, important institutional committees, but this is one that sticks in my mind. I was asked to form a committee, and I was asked to include certain people on it and to examine what to do for an online research report. Probably the assumption was I would know, but through the encouragement or whatever—I don't know. I don't think encouragement is the word. In discussing how to do this with two people—John Phelps and Melissa Burkett—and my own inclinations, I realized the best way to approach it was to have some pretty vague notions of what to do and then let a group of faculty decide what the thing should do, what kind of capabilities it should have. That was mainly it. What kind of capability should it have? What are the purposes of those capabilities? And then to hand those over to—hand those over to the executives to make a determination of—well, let me step back. Figure out what resources were needed to execute whatever they decided, and then tell the executives what resources were needed if you want this. If you don't want quite that much, here's the resources needed. If you don't want that much here's the resources you need. What I was proud of is that at least on that day every committee member showed up almost for every meeting, and I was proud to learn how not to do what the habit of MD Anderson administrators is, which is to present a plan and ask its committee to approve it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:14:35.5

How did the online version of the research report evolve? What form does it take now?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:14:42.9

It's gone.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:14:43.6

It's gone?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:14:44.8

It turns out now—in those days that thing was something—you gathered the information from the faculty. And again, even though it was online it could be done whenever you wanted to but

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you were supposed to keep it up to date, and we had systems for reminding them and so on. They resented that even, and really it became the case that the information is available everywhere. You just need to have a way to organize it in ways that other people can access it, and there's something called [SciVal Experts](#), which Dr. Bogler was very deeply involved in, and though we had tried to kill the online report several times because we can—because we weren't getting exactly the support we needed and it was clear that other people felt it was a waste of time, once he became V.P. he just decided on his own because of the availability of SciVal Experts versus killing it online—SciVal Experts collects information from publishing databases—publication databases and some kind of database here at MD Anderson and merges them and shows what subject areas these people are working in. Because the main purpose of the research report truthfully in this day was to identify people who could be good collaborators in certain areas, and now there are easy ways to do that, but at the time there weren't. We had—well, that's enough of that. It's gone.

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Chapter 11

B: Key MD Anderson Figures

Presidents and a Senior Vice President

Story Codes

C: Portraits
A: Critical Perspectives
C: Professional Practice
C: The Professional at Work
C: Collaborations
C: Leadership
C: Giving Recognition
C: Critical Perspectives

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:16:23.4

It's gone. All right. I was wondering if you would comment on the series of administrators that you've worked with over the years, because when you came R. Lee Clark was still here and you've gone through all of the presidents. Now you've been with Ronald DePinho. Would you be willing to give us your observations on their leadership styles—similarities and differences?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:16:55.8

I'm willing and don't know what—I'm not close to any of these people, and you will never—you will not be surprised at anything I say about Clark. Everybody will say this—that he was a powerful figure who nevertheless acknowledged and recognized people no matter what their standing in the institution or their status in the institution. He would say hi to the lowest of the low and the highest of the high in a way that made you feel like he really knew who you were. And I never had a meeting with him, so I can't say much about that. Dr. LeMaistre [Charles A. LeMaistre, MD [Oral History Interview]] was a less-feared president let's say.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:17:39.0

That's interesting. I'd never—I mean I don't mean to derail you, but I'd never heard that R. Lee Clark might have been a feared person.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:17:47.3

Oh, yeah.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:17:46.8

How so?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:17:49.2

Very—he was very concerned about his own—I hate to be so simple as glory, but his own—his own centrality to the mission of the institution and whether others were contributing to it or not, and people he thought should or were—I hate to say this because I don't really know this from personal fact but from personal observation—but I understand that people who he thought were hogging more glory than they deserved often felt his wrath. I don't know that to be true though.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:18:38.8

Interesting observation though.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:18:41.6

It was not my observation. It's others'. My observation is that he was feared. My boss feared him. When it was heard that he might come down to our offices, we were told to clean up our desks and look busy. Dr. LeMaistre did not come around to offices, but he met with the boss then, and when the boss came back she said she was in love; that she had shown him what we did and that he saw that we were valuable. And I'd say Dr. LeMaistre let people lead themselves. I do not know how he shaped the institution even truthfully, and there were many people who felt he wasn't shaping it at all, and I think that they're probably wrong. I think that he—I'm guessing—I'm believing in retrospect that he let good people lead, and when other people didn't like the way those good people were leading, they wished that Dr. LeMaistre would step in and do something about it. That's my guess about all of that. And then in retrospect Dr. LeMaistre was a person to be very fond of. He seemed in some ways fond of us.

Dr. Clark's ability to lead people was based on a tremendously outgoing and involving personality—charisma beyond belief except that DePinho may have that same charisma. Though he outwardly was extremely friendly, I suspect that Dr. LeMaistre really had more affection for people than Dr. Clark did. In retrospect Dr. Mendelsohn's arrival strikes me as the sort of reincarnation of the dispute in Europe these days between austerity and stimulus. So when Dr. Mendelsohn arrived at MD Anderson the belief was that we should embrace prospects of austerity and to begin to look at how we could survive with less, and Dr. LeMaistre somehow—not LeMaistre excuse me, Dr. Mendelsohn somehow figured out that no, that's not what we need. We need stimulus. We need to grow. We need to expand. We could be successful in a different way, in an aggressive way. Instead of accepting the judgment of consultants who—I

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don't know if he didn't respect them or he had different opinions or what—but Dr. Mendelsohn never, ever showed up in our department, rarely showed any interest in it, was somewhat of a person who floated above everybody else and did not—again, this is—I don't—I never worked closely with him but I did not—I saw him in some meetings and I actually had meetings with him but—and he was—he was respectful, although I saw him be disrespectful of people. I never felt a personal connection with him at all, and there is much talk of course that he turned MD Anderson into a business; and acknowledgement by many that if he hadn't done it we might be nothing and dismay from other people who don't like being a business.

I can't tell you anything about Dr. DePinho that you can't read every day in the faculty blogs, so I have nothing to say about that. But I did have a meeting with him that was supposed to last fifteen minutes that lasted thirty. I think I may have hinted to this about—hinted to this—hinted to you about this, but anyway I arrived at the scheduled time for my meeting. I was waiting in the waiting room or waiting area. At the appointed time he didn't send out somebody to tell me it was okay to go in now. He came out, he stuck his hand out, and he said, “Walter, it's so good to meet you.” And he showed me into the office, and he sat down not in the chair opposite me on the table but in the chair beside me, and we discussed the things that I was interested in, and he said—and I believed him—that he understood the importance of these things and he believed—he thought they were—that they were important to him and to his group, and he did understand the difference between editing that was useful and editing that wasn't. He since has sent one or two pieces to us and was very quick to praise the effect or the effort—success, really. I felt the whole time that he was completely engaged with me and with issues that in the normal scheme of things probably wouldn't be of much interest to a president—although perhaps to him publishing is extremely important.

Dr. Mendelsohn— publishing in the general literature was not important to Dr. LeMaistre—not important to Dr. Mendelsohn personally—important to Dr. Clark because he knew that made a difference in the institution's reputation, and that was extremely important to him. But I suspect that to Dr. DePinho that it's personally important. He sort of dismisses his success in publishing in *Cell* and *Science*, PNAS and so on—that's no big deal. That's baloney! He loves it. He's so proud that he's been published in these places, and it's not—it's false modesty, I'm sure of it. It may not even be modesty. It may just be his way of bragging without seeming to.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:25:29.1

It can never be unimportant to have published in all these places.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:25:33.7

No.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:25:35.8

Not at all. Is there anyone else in the administration that you'd like to comment on in terms of their style or working relationship, the impact they've had on Scientific Publications?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:25:47.3

[Steven] Tomasovic had—have you met him?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:25:49.9

Yeah. He was the first person I interviewed, too.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:25:51.8

Okay. It took me a while to get used to working with him. He was very unemotional and focused on facts so much that I couldn't read him, which I wanted to. I suppose I shouldn't have wanted to and I'm thinking that he himself never felt the need to read somebody. He just did what he was supposed to do. But over the fifteen years we worked together, we became at least professional friends and discussed many issues of various levels that were important to him or important to me in a useful—well, I don't know about useful—but in a way that indicates that you care what the other person thinks or knows about this particular issue, so I'd say he and I were an ideal pair eventually. I think he softened over the years. I've been reading recently that people just do. He often—well, several times challenged me and most especially in the education area to succeed. I think I said that earlier. I showed him the article that we had written with the expectation that he would say, "Well gosh, that is—that's quite tough. I don't know what we'll ever do about it." He didn't say that. He said, "What will you do about it now?" That was terrific. He has had to calm me down once or twice for this, that, or the other thing—usually being disrespectful to people I've found not worth respecting, which is not the way I'm supposed to act. And he had the softest touch when he did something like that. I don't know Oliver [Bogler, MD]. He's totally different from Steve. I suspect eventually that the same thing would happen if I were still to be here—that we would reach a kind of agreement that we knew each other well enough to trust each other to do what the right thing was to the best of our ability at that time. I don't think we're there right now, but I don't think that matters. Well gosh, how long has he been here?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:28:32.4

Less than—a little less than a year.

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:28:33.9

Yeah. I was still worried that Steve was going to find a typo in something I wrote because he was like that. If he found a typo he would mark it in something you thought was just trivial. Come on! That's not what this is about. You could count on him to find every error you made. And it was very annoying at the beginning. I wanted to just tell him to leave that stuff alone.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:28:59.9

Right.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:29:00.9

And I got to—I got used to it eventually.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:29:04.1

Yeah. I think it's a difference in people who are more centered in big-picture thinking versus people who are—they balance big-picture and detailed focus. It kind of drives me crazy too when somebody goes for those details when I just—I just—just tell me the overall impression.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:29:22.1

Yeah. You just messed it up with that mistake you made.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:29:25.9

Yeah, there we go. Anything else about Dr. Tomasovic?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:29:35.2

I don't think so.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:29:37.3

Okay.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:29:38.0

I think he's happy. He's told me so. I believe he gave everything he could to this institution. I believe when he saw a job he did it. I think in that sense he's just like me. I don't think we are

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the same, but I think there are many things that are the same in or are like each other, and I do think he had courage in the face of disagreement. The person in that job gets mortared by the faculty all the time because they're in—they have offices that report to them that affect the day-to-day lives of the faculty, and every single one of those people on the faculty expects those things to run a certain way. If they don't they're certain that it's the senior vice president's fault. And yet the senior vice president—or fault may be even down to having made a decision that leads to something that they think is stupid. I got that—those kind of comments from faculty when Bowen was that person and when Tomasovic was that person. I haven't been around long enough where people have other gripes that are bigger than the senior vice president these days. I don't want to trivialize it because these were important day-to-day things for them that weren't being handled the way they thought was sensible, and they may well have been handled that way because of law or regulation. It may have been handled that way because the vice president saw that if it was handled the way they wanted it to be handled something else would be screwed up or somebody else would have to do more work than they should have to, or whatever. I don't know the reasons. I just know somehow or other that person gets mortared all the time. I don't know whether Oliver has yet, but I'll bet he will if he hasn't.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:32:01.4

Yeah, it's a tough job. A very tough job.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:32:03.8

In a way, pleasing all the faculty and while pleasing senior administration who want you to make sure that there are no mistakes made anywhere.

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Chapter 12

A: Post-Retirement Activities

Paying Attention: A Professional and Personal Habit

Story Codes

C: Portraits
C: Discovery, Creativity and Innovation
C: Faith, Values, Beliefs
A: Activities Outside Institution
A: Career and Accomplishments
A: Post Retirement Activities
A: Professional Values, Ethics, Purpose
A: Character, Values, Beliefs, Talents
A: Personal Background
C: Professional Practice

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:32:17.5

Will you tell me about getting the [John P. McGovern Award](#) for excellence in biomedical communication? That was in 2001?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:32:32.9

I was very pleased to get it, of course. I thought I gave a great talk, if I do say so myself. I dealt with the issues that I care about, and I wanted others to think about them in the same way. I never once thought that I could share the podium with some of the other winners like Jane Brody or Oliver Sacks, but I didn't think that I didn't deserve it. I just think it meant that there are only so many excellent biomedical communicators in the world, and sometimes you don't have to be the best one to get an award.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:33:25.1

But the talk that you gave for that particular—for that event really—that turned into your article about how to basically create a narrative in a scientific article, and it seemed to me when I read it that it really expressed all of your basic values about what good scientific writing is. It was a unique opportunity to voice those ideas.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:33:56.2

I worked pretty hard on it. Maybe I didn't even have all those ideas before I wrote it. I don't

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know. I don't remember any more. I just know what I concluded there, and what I concluded in that article I feel even more strongly about today, which is that people need to tell what happened. If they want other people to care about science they need to tell what happened not pretend that nothing but what you expected to happen happened in the exact order you expected it to happen in, because that's not interesting. That's basically it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:34:33.2

It loses a sense of the adventure that everybody knows is there.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:34:37.4

Or hope is there at least. God, why would I want to be in science if that's all you do is execute some rote thing that's written down in a book somewhere? I can cook at home.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:34:57.9

That's a good one. That's a good one. Is there anything else that you'd like to—or maybe I should ask you— Well, you already told me you had absolutely no plans for retirement. Are you going to modify that?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:35:15.3

Well, when I said I have no plans I mean that I have no plans to change. I have plans to do things that I have been doing for decades but have had less and less opportunity to do and still would love to do them. I doubt that I'll do anything that I haven't already done at least something of and enjoyed unless it's to volunteer somewhere. Brian wants me to volunteer at the Houston Public Library for their archive—photo archive project.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:35:51.8

You're interested in photography?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:35:53.3

Very much, yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:35:54.1

Are you a photographer?

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:35:56.3

Of sorts. Good enough. I can compose an interesting photo fairly easily. I learned from one of the well-known photographers in Houston how to do that.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:36:12.5

I had occasion to go into the new digital media center at the public library—central—the central branch, and it's really impressive.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:36:28.3

That's where we're talking about. They're looking for people who will help them—probably do scutwork, but that's okay—regarding their photo archives and the history of Houston.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:36:40.6

What else do you plan to do that you've done a little bit of before?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:36:46.7

I've done a lot of orchid tending, but I'll do more at home. I'll do more landscaping because it's hard work, but I'll keep the landscape up better with the help of people who will do the work for me. Cook more. I tend not to cook so much during the week.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:37:09.6

What's your specialty?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:37:11.1

I don't have one. I just like to cook. I don't do Oriental food, and I don't do Mexican food. Fran does that. I'll do almost anything else. Reading. I think I probably read enough, but I may read more.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:37:36.3

Is there a particular book that's had a real impact on you? Or author?

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Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:37:46.0

I don't know. I've just read—oddly, I just finished *The Sun Also Rises* again, and when I finished it I had this very emotional reaction to it. I understood better what Hemingway did than when I first read it, which was in high school. But I did have a teacher who had—who was from Michigan who had interviewed Hemingway and knew him and knew about his books and what they meant.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:38:22.6

What was that reaction about do you think?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:38:25.6

I don't know. Like I had just read a treasure of some kind. I think people don't appreciate Hemingway any more or not the way they used to. I don't completely understand why I had that reaction. It could have been just fond memory from when I read it the first time, but I didn't remember that much of it. That was fifty years ago. Anyway, I don't know who's affected me the most among readers, writers, but he's one of course. And I admire Vladimir Nabokov for an amazing ability to write—though he said he edits every word some dozens of times—every word he ever wrote, so I guess you can understand that.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:39:39.0

Anything else outside you feel—anything you feel has been a real influence on you—kind of shaped your thinking or—?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:39:52.6

No. I've been lucky in a funny way which is that I've noticed that there are people who don't notice anything much. They live in their brains. They barely have ears. They barely have eyes. They barely have a nose and a tongue. And I've never had that problem. For them it's not a problem, okay. But to me, I just can't imagine not noticing what the heck is going on in the world. When you walk down the street don't you notice that there's a cicada on the curb? No. There was a cicada back there, really? What's a cicada? What's my point here? I don't know. Part of why I like orchids, part of why I like to cook—I have a wine cellar. I like wine. Cellar would be the wrong word. We don't have any cellars in Houston, but wine closet. I write some. It will be interesting to see whether—now that I don't have an excuse—whether I can write when I'm not just inspired to write. When I'm inspired to write it comes fairly easily. I'm not saying it's great, but it comes fairly easily. Can I write if I say today I'm going to write? I don't know.

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We'll see. I can write a business letter any time you ask me to. It'll be a great business letter. You tell me what your purpose is; I will write you a letter that works. But that's not what we're talking about here.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:41:44.2

Do you write fiction or non-fiction?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:41:48.1

I don't write either one. I write. I try to get down into words what I see and smell and feel.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:41:54.9

Creative non-fiction.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:41:55.9

I guess so, yeah. And not very long. Short pieces.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:42:10.1

Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:42:12.0

I don't think so. Except for one thing, because this has suddenly gotten large importance for me. I recently—like in three or four days ago—was called by a man named Chapin Rodríguez, who is a scientist who has decided that he wants to affect many underserved—if you want—universities and help their people learn to write better all over the world—China, Spain, Yugoslavia—and he wanted to hear about the program here. I talked about it and told him some things, and he asked me at one point in there, “How do you do this?” and I took that to be a question of me. Although now that I say that out loud I'm thinking it might have been how does one do this, but I took it as how do I do this, and my answer was I don't know how I do this. Something needs to be done and I do it. But I realized in thinking about it more—or think I realized in thinking about it more—that what I do is fairly simple but moderately unusual. I pay attention. I ask questions and I listen to the answers. So if that was on my tombstone I would be satisfied. I used to want “Here lies Walter Pagel. He never went to AstroWorld,” but that seems pretty trivial now. I think this is much better.

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Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:44:12.0

I think it is. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:44:15.8

No. That's it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:44:17.4

Thank you very much for your time.

Walter Pagel, ELS (D)

1:44:18.7

You're welcome. I enjoyed it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

1:44:19.5

I did, too. It is 3:55 and I'm turning off the recorder.

1:44:26.0 (End of Audio Session 2)