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COMMENTS TO EDITOR: I am recommending major revision of this work. The reviewers and I all are in agreement that the heart of the essay does not come into till the last third, and that the earlier material, while interesting, is excessively discursive and unfocused. With more emphasis on how writing serves to "witness" patient stories and "manage" meaning, this could be an outstanding essay.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: While there is much to commend in this essay, in particular its appreciation for narrative, it could benefit from a major rewrite. For one thing, it takes a long time to get to the heart of the matter, especially from a family physician perspective, i.e., para 11, "The practice of medicine is the management of meaning" (great sentence, by the way), and how writing advances this process. This insight, which is wonderful, needs to be elaborated on through illustrative anecdotes. Along similar lines, the idea of witnessing is a critically important one, which deserves more development, including perhaps an example of how writing has served as a personal act of witnessing. The introductory paragraphs are very discursive. The discussion of other arts forms, while interesting, seems a rather roundabout way to arrive at writing per se. Those words might be better used focusing on the meaning of writing to a family physician.

I would also recommend shifting the first person plural (we) to first person singular (I). Why people write, and the paths they take to writing, are so variable. This essay is an opportunity for you to describe your own journey.

One minor point - I believe the title should read, "Learning by Writing" or possibly "Learning to Write."

We are attaching a revision of the manuscript by one of the journal's staff editors. You do not have to accept all suggested changes, but please consider them in light of the above comments.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: The author has done a superb job of considering and integrating two rather disparate reviews while preserving his own unique emphasis. The author has preserved the poetic lyricism of his writing while creating an essay that is less discursive, more cohesive, and with a stronger organizational spine. I recommend publication.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for such a thoughtful and careful revision. I agree that this current version is much stronger and more focused. The opening immediately engages the reader, while the final paragraph sparkles. The interesting parallels you draw to other art forms are now appropriately subordinated to the main point of writing as a way of listening to the stories in family medicine, without losing your central preoccupation with how we make sense of our worlds. I also really like the way your essay develops within the context of "managing meaning." The additions about the craft of writing and witnessing are both wonderful, and fuse the process of writing with the process of clinical medicine in a powerful and moving way. Finally, the shift to first person singular in my read makes the essay more intimate and more illuminating.

About the title: Thank you for explaining the pun, that is indeed a clever idea. For me personally, unfortunately, the one phrase did not suggest the other; and I worry that the inherent awkwardness and apparent ungrammaticality of the phrase might discourage readers from thinking more deeply about its meaning. I will leave it to your judgment as to whether to go with a more conventional title- perhaps you can ask a few colleagues if they "get" it.

This essay conveys beautifully the idea that the act of writing itself can help us see more clearly, hear more accurately, and understand better the people and world around us. This is a compelling message to share with family physicians plying their daily trade because it suggests that by paying attention (through writing, photography, or music) docs can become better at hearing "the whole story."