Out of Hours

Sam kicks off the first in a series of articles on alternative forms of writing that medical writers get up to ‘out of hours’.

Describe the type of writing you do ‘out of hours’.
I have dabbled in various other doodlings, which in the past have included creative writing, writing for charities and researching and writing up my family history.

Do you have a favourite topic or a preferred style of writing?
Yes, I really enjoyed the challenge of creative writing after such a long break as I hadn’t done any since I was at school. I was afraid that with all my scientific training, I would have forgotten how to be creative, but I’m happy to say, it was like riding a bike, and just as much fun! My favourite ‘out of hours’ job so far has to be writing up my own family’s interesting history.

Describe a recent assignment.
In 2007, I completed the two-year long labour of love of writing up my family history. My parents’ and grandparents’ stories were so interesting that I felt committed to getting them down on paper before the chance slipped away. I worked with my dad to a large extent to capture his memories, and I discovered in the process where I got my ability to write from. His contributions were well thought out and very moving. The process was cathartic for my dad who hadn’t given voice to some difficult issues for a long time, and it brought the two of us closer together. Other family members were very generous in what they shared too.

How did you choose the topic?
This was always something that I had wanted to do, and as the last generation aged, I realised I couldn’t delay it any longer. I wanted to make a living document that my children’s generation could read and add to if they so wished. I was so well-supported by the rest of the family that I feel the topic really chose me, not the other way around.

What did the assignment involve?
I wrote a plan for the project as a whole and circulated it to interested members of the family by e-mail. I then discussed each person’s intended contribution with them, to help them develop their ideas. As they provided their contributions, where I saw a really interesting story that I thought needed more focus, I solicited a more in-depth piece about it from the family member in question. Some were able to write with relatively little support, but others needed a little more guidance. An aspect that I couldn’t help so much with initially was the creation of both my maternal and paternal sides of the family tree. This was mainly done on paper by the older generations and was posted between the UK, USA and Pakistan to add detail. I then reproduced the resulting tree electronically. As we discovered more and more information, I would receive emails from family members and update the tree accordingly. The family history now consists of the tree documents, plus a collection of memories and anecdotes written by three generations of my family. I had copies of the document hard bound for all the children in the generation subsequent to mine, and distributed these at Christmas 2007.

Describe how this type of writing helps you with your technical work.
Creation of the tree was a challenge and I am now an expert in creating large flow diagrams in Microsoft Word!

How do aspects of your technical work help with your writing “out of hours”?
The project required extensive project management—a skill I use daily in my medical writing work. The editing and proof-reading skills I have acquired over the years were also put to good use in this project of contributions from non-professional writers.

If you have an ‘out of hours’ story to share, please contact Raquel at medical.writing@billiones.biz

EMWA freelance logo design competition

The freelance section of The Write Stuff (TWS), ‘Out On Our Own’ (OOOO) is getting a new logo. We are lucky to have the help of a graphic designer but also want to give you the chance to be involved. EMWA members are therefore invited to use their creativity and submit their logo ideas and designs for consideration.

The logo should contain the words ‘Out On Our Own’ or ‘EMWA Freelancers’, if possible. Ideas can be provided descriptively; designs should be submitted in any of the following file formats: .eps, .wmf, .pdf, .tif, .jpg, or .bmp and be e-mailed to sam@samhamiltonmwservices.co.uk and medical.writing@billiones.biz by 20 April 2011.

The winning entry will get a graphic design makeover prior to launch; will appear in each subsequent issue of TWS and will become synonymous with the EMWA freelance contingent. The winner will receive a prize and be interviewed for OOOO—and, of course, be elevated to cult freelance hero status! The final logo will be unveiled at the Berlin May 2011 Freelance Business Forum.

Please show your support: Get involved, share your hidden talents and make an enduring contribution to your organisation, EMWA. Happy designing!