

The Whole World is a Stage

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As I ease my way through middle age, I often reminisce of some childhood memories and realize some of the life-long lessons that I have learned from them. One memory in particular was an act often seen on The Ed Sullivan Show.

Some of you may be fortunate enough to be too young to remember this show. For you, the lessons and wisdom shared by those who precede you in this profession, particularly those of your mentors from the AAPP, are most important and must be valued. This lesson is no different.

Each Sunday evening, providing my sisters and I were well behaved, we were rewarded with some “stay up late time”. This meant that we were allowed to stay up once our show, The Wonderful World of Disney, was over. Desperately struggling to avoid the Sandman, we joined our parents to watch the Ed Sullivan Show.

Aside from Ed’s little pet mouse, Topo Gigio, an act that I always looked forward to involved a performer who was able to balance and spin plates on the top of a thin wooden pole anchored to the stage. As long as he kept the plates spinning, the inertia kept the plates on the pole. He started with one pole and plate... then two... then three...and within a few minutes, he was running back and forth to maintain the inertia of many plates! As he performed this amazing feat, frantic circus music played. In fact, I often imagine that I can still hear that music when my day gets rather hectic.

So what’s the lesson that I often reflect back upon? Our life, both personally and professionally, has many plates. Bills that are due, the kid’s soccer game, the angry patient, the diabetic infection, co-worker conflicts, meetings, medical records, and so on. Occasionally, just like on television, a neglected plate may fall. Studying this performer on the Ed Sullivan show indeed gave me some valuable insight into life at a very young age. The lessons that this performer taught me were:

- One of the greatest skills required to be a successful performer in life was time management. Knowing the status of all of your plates, and paying equal attention to them, is crucial.
- In you see a plate in trouble, quickly address it.
- If a plate should fall, don’t panic. Have the ability to laugh at yourself, pick it up, and get it going again.
- The pace that you set for yourself should be solely up to you. If you can’t successfully spin anymore plates right now, don’t. Wait until you can handle them.
- Finally, when you have done a good job, be proud of yourself. Don’t be afraid to take a bow.

As I see patients, manage my own practice, travel, lecture, write, and consult, it’s rare that I ever make it through my hectic weeks without thinking about this performer. Yes, sometimes I can even hear his music. Weird? Perhaps. But I encourage each of you to find those valuable lessons hidden in your childhood. Share them with your friends, colleagues, and your own children. After all, when it’s all said and done, indeed the objective of life is to create “*a really big shuuue!*”