

*presidential address*

## Classical quotes for critical care

ROBERT F. WILSON, MD

Members of the Society of Critical Care Medicine and Friends:

I would like to thank all of you for the tremendous honor that you have bestowed upon me for this past year. I'd like to particularly thank Norma Shoemaker, our Executive Director, for her tremendous help and guidance. I don't think that many of you can adequately appreciate how hard she works running the Society, keeping track of almost 3,000 members, and monitoring all of the various details associated with the annual meeting.

Particular thanks also to the Editor for not only helping me to be one of the founders of the Society back in 1970, but also for the tremendous amount of time, blood, and sweat that he has contributed to our outstanding journal.

I am also especially thankful to Bart Chernow for his program innovations and very hard work with this year's meeting. It's great to be a part of such an outstanding success.

I must also thank all the members of our Council. They have put up with a great deal from me. Although they grumbled a bit, by working through dinner and late into the night on several occasions, the Council accomplished a great deal. I feel that they have prepared for next year exceptionally well. I think that we are starting Dennis Greenbaum's presidency off with a bang. We are expecting great things from him.

I must also give a very special thanks to my dear wife. She has put up with an unbelievable amount of hassle, particularly during this past year. I wasn't home very much and when I was home, I tended to be tired and grumpy. I really don't know how she puts up with it all, but I appreciate her more than she will ever know.

For some time I was thinking about what I could give as a presidential address to this group. I carefully considered a number of scientific and weighty political topics. However, I somehow didn't really feel comfortable with them. Finally, I decided that since the Society has a very special spot in my heart, perhaps I could share a few of my thoughts concerning life and critical care with you. These thoughts will be presented in the

---

Presented, in part, at the 15th annual meeting of the Society of Critical Care Medicine, Washington, DC, May 29, 1986.

form of many of the quotations that I have enjoyed and loved over the years.

I'm convinced that no one working in critical care can be truly successful and happy unless he has a very special concern for the welfare of his patients. I think that St. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians captured the type of love we should have when he wrote:

Though I speak with the tongues of men  
and of angels, and have not love,  
I am becoming as sounding brass,  
or a tinkling cymbal

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor,  
and though I give my body to be burned,  
and have not love, I am nothing.

Love suffreth long, and is kind, Love envieth not,  
Love vaunteth not itself and is not puffed up

Love beareth all things, believeth all things,  
Hopeth all things, endureth all things,  
Love never fails.

Corinthians 13:1-8

Every patient is important, and every encounter with that patient and his family is important. Things that we may sometimes consider trivial, and thus overlook, especially in view of the complexity of multiple medical problems, may have tremendous significance. As John Donne said:

No man is an island, entire of itself  
every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.  
If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less,  
as well as if a promontory were,  
as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were.  
Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved  
in mankind,  
and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls,  
it tolls for thee.

*Devotions upon Emergent  
Occasions #17  
John Donne*

Very few people work harder than ICU personnel, but not infrequently it doesn't really seem to change things.

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher,  
vanity of vanities; all is vanity.  
What profit hath a man of all his labor  
which he taketh under the sun?

One generation passeth away,  
and another generation cometh:  
but the earth abideth forever  
The sun also ariseth.

Ecclesiastes 1:2–5

All our skill, wisdom, and efforts may seem to be of no avail, not only with patient care, but also academically.

I returned, and saw under the sun,  
that the race is not to the swift,  
nor the battle to the strong,  
neither yet bread to the wise,  
nor yet riches to men of understanding,  
nor yet favor to men of skill;  
but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Ecclesiastes 9:11–12

It's interesting that the great sports writer, Grantland Rice, also quoted this passage; however, he added: "But that's the way to bet."

Sometimes we might like to remake the world.

Ah Love! could you and I with Him conspire  
to grasp this Sorry Scheme of Things entire  
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then  
Remold it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

*The Rubāiyāt of Omar  
Khayyām, Stanza 99*  
Edward FitzGerald

Often there seems to be nothing we can do about what is happening around us.

The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,  
Moves on; nor all your Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line.  
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

*The Rubāiyāt of Omar  
Khayyām, Stanza 71*  
Edward FitzGerald

Sometimes even your best efforts aren't recognized or appreciated. The journal may have dared to turn down your last paper.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,  
The dark, unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

*Elegy Written in a Country  
Churchyard*  
Thomas Gray

Sometimes it's surprising how rapidly some of the younger men rise academically, and one might wonder, as did Cassius of Julius Caesar:

Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed  
that he hath grown so great.

*Julius Caesar; Act I, Scene II*  
William Shakespeare

On the other hand, most achievements come as a result of very hard work:

The heights by great men reached and kept  
were not attained by sudden flight  
But they, while their companions slept,  
Were toiling upward in the night.

*The Ladder of St. Augustine,  
Stanza 10*  
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

For an ICU to function optimally, everyone on the team has to do his job well—no matter how menial or small it is:

We can't all be captains, we've got to be crew,  
There's something for all of us here,  
There's big work to do, and there's lesser to do,  
And the task you must do is the near.

If you can't be a pine on the top of the hill  
Be a scrub in the valley—but be  
The best little scrub by the side of the rill;  
Be a bush if you can't be a tree.

If you can't be a highway then just be a trail,  
If you can't be the sun be a star;  
It isn't by size that you win or you fail—  
Be the best of whatever you are!

*Be the Best of Whatever You  
are*  
Douglas Malloch

—And, once a task is begun, finish it, or as one unknown poet wrote:

If a Task is once begun,  
Never leave it till it's done.  
Be the labor great or small,  
Do it well or not at all.

Unknown

As we work, we will always meet obstacles. But we must keep trying despite multiple impediments.

If you strike a thorn on a rose,  
Keep a-goin'!  
If it hails or if it snows,  
Keep a-goin'!  
'Taint no use to sit an' whine  
When the fish ain't on your line;  
Bait your hook an' keep a-tryin'—  
Keep a-goin'!

*Keep a-Goin'*  
Frank L. Stanton

We must always try to do our best, even if it is only for our own conscience.

There is no witness so dreadful, no accuser  
so terrible as the conscience that dwells in  
the heart of every man.

*History, Book XVIII, Sec 43*  
Polybius (208–126 BC)

## Or as in Polonius's advice to Laertes

This above all, to thine own self be true  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

*Hamlet*; Act I, Scene III  
William Shakespeare

## Churchill also noted

History with its flickering lamp stumbles  
along the trail of the past, trying to  
reconstruct its scenes, to revive its echoes,  
and kindle with pale gleams the passion of  
former days.

What is the worth of all this? The only  
guide to a man is his conscience; the only  
shield to his memory is the rectitude and  
sincerity of his actions.

It is very imprudent to walk through life  
without this shield, because we are so  
often mocked by the failure of our hopes  
and the upsetting of our calculations;  
but with this shield, however the fates may play,  
we march always in the ranks of honor.

Tribute to Neville  
Chamberlain,  
House of Commons,  
November 12, 1940  
Sir Winston Spencer Churchill

We must also recognize that we can never stop trying  
to learn. Acquiring medical knowledge is like rowing  
upstream against a strong current. You have to work  
very hard to make any headway at all, but if you slacken  
at all in your efforts, you're rapidly swept downstream.  
I recall that I never felt as confident about my medical  
knowledge as I did as a third-year medical student.

A little learning is a dangerous thing  
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:  
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,  
And drinking largely sobers us again.

or

Be not the first by whom the new are tried  
nor yet the last to lay the old aside.

*An Essay on Criticism*  
Alexander Pope

In reading late at night, one might have experiences  
similar to those of Poe:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak  
and weary,  
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten  
lore,  
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a  
tapping,  
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber  
door.  
"Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my  
chamber door:  
Only this, and nothing more."

*The Raven*  
Edgar Allen Poe

I'm sure some of my students and residents would  
like to forget some of the quaint and curious volumes  
I've written.

Not only must our knowledge grow, but also our  
souls.

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,  
As the swift seasons roll!  
Leave thy low-vaulted past!  
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,  
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,  
Till thou at length art free,  
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!

*The Chambered Nautilus*  
Oliver Wendell Holmes

We also need perspective and insight:

O wad some Power the giftie gie us  
To see ourselves as ithers see us!  
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,  
An' foolish notion:  
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,  
An'ev'n devotion!

*To a Louse on Seeing One on  
a Lady's Bonnet at Church*  
Robert Burns

Eventually, no matter how much we work, we need  
to go to a very special place we call home.

It takes a heap o' livin' in a house t' make it home,  
A heap o' sun an' shadder, an' ye sometimes have t' roam  
Afore ye really 'preciate the things ye lef' behind  
An' hunger fer 'em somehow, with 'em allus on yer mind.  
It don't make any differunce how rich ye get t' be  
How much yer chairs an' tables cost, how great yer  
luxury;  
It ain't home t' ye, though it be the palace of a king,  
Until somehow yer soul is sort o' wrapped 'round every-  
thing.

*Home*  
Edgar A. Guest

Increasingly, members of our Society travel out of  
the country to give lectures, and it's interesting how  
much traveling abroad gets one to appreciate his home-  
land.

Breathes there the man with soul so dead  
Who never to himself hath said:  
"This is my own, my native land"?  
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned  
As home his footsteps he hath turned,  
From wandering on a foreign strand?

*Love of Country*  
From "The Lay of the Last  
Minstrel"  
Sir Walter Scott

At home, at the end of the day, we may finally be  
able to relax with some peace and quiet.

The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,  
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,  
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,  
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,  
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

*Elegy Written in a Country  
Churchyard*  
Thomas Gray

Longfellow also captured a sense of that relaxation that might come at the end of the day.

The day is done, and the darkness  
Falls from the wings of Night,  
As a feather is wafted downward  
From an eagle in his flight.

And the night shall be filled with music  
And the cares that infest the day,  
Shall fold their tents like the Arabs  
And as silently steal away.

*The Day Is Done*  
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

As we try to relax, it may be helpful to close our eyes and think of some pleasant thoughts or scenes.

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

*The Daffodils*  
William Wordsworth

Contemplating a work of art may be helpful.

A thing of beauty is a joy forever:  
Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep  
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep  
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing

*Endymion*  
John Keats

And another picture one might consider for our mind's eye:

And still of a winter's night, they say, when the  
wind is in the trees,  
When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon  
cloudy seas,  
When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the  
purple moor,

A highwayman comes riding,  
Riding, riding,  
A highwayman comes riding up to the old inn-door

*The Highwayman*  
Alfred Noyes

We also all need someone to love. Perhaps one of the most touching and famous quotations on love was written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.  
I love thee to the level of every day's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;

I love thee purely, as men turn from Praise.  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints.—I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.

*Sonnets from the Portuguese,*  
No. 1  
Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Or:

She was a phantom of delight  
When first she gleamed upon my sight;  
A lovely apparition, sent  
To be a moment's ornament;  
Her eyes as stars of twilight fair;

Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill;  
A perfect woman, nobly planned  
To warm, to comfort, and command;  
And yet a spirit still, and bright  
With something of angelic light

*She was a Phantom of Delight*  
William Wordsworth

My wife, Jackie, commented that the last verse of this quotation really describes the perfect ICU nurse.

You should enjoy your children while they're small. They grow up too quickly, and it's very easy to be too busy to spend enough time with them.

Blessings on thee, little man,  
Barefoot boy, with cheek of tan!  
With thy turned-up pantaloons,  
And thy merry whistled tunes;  
With thy red lip, redder still.

Every morn shall lead thee through  
Fresh baptisms of the dew;  
Every evening from thy feet  
Shall the cool wind kiss the heat;

All too soon these feet must hide  
In the prison cells of pride,  
Lose the freedom of the sod,

Like a colt's for work be shod  
 Made to tread the mills of toil  
 Happy if their track be found  
 Never on forbidden ground;  
 Happy if they sink not in  
 Quick and treacherous sands of sin,  
 Ah! that thou couldst know thy joy,  
 Ere it passes, barefoot boy!

*The Barefoot Boy*  
 John Greenleaf Whittier

No matter how hard we try, some of our patients will die. Our attitudes about death are important and may be difficult to hide from our patients and their families. Sometimes life seems very empty.

O! that this too too solid flesh would melt,  
 Thaw and resolve itself into a dew;  
 Or that the Everlasting had not fixed  
 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!  
 How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
 Seem to me all the uses of this world.

*Hamlet, Act I, Scene II*  
 Shakespeare

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
 To the last syllable of recorded time;  
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
 And then is heard no more; it is a tale  
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
 Signifying nothing.

*Macbeth, Act V, Scene V*  
 Shakespeare

Tennyson presents a better attitude toward death:

Sunset and evening star,  
 And one clear call for me,  
 And may there be no moaning of the bar  
 When I put out to sea.  
 Twilight and evening bell,  
 And after that the dark!  
 And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
 When I embark;  
 For tho' from out our bourne of time and place  
 The flood may bear me far,  
 I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
 When I have crossed the bar.

*Crossing the Bar*  
 Alfred Tennyson

Bryant also tells us how to approach death calmly;

So live that when thy summons comes to join  
 The innumerable caravan that moves  
 To that mysterious realm, where each shall take  
 His chamber in the silent halls of death.  
 Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,  
 Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed  
 By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave

Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch  
 About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

*Thanatopsis*  
 William Cullen Bryant

And death may be a new beginning—perhaps for some new but joyous work.

When earth's last picture is painted, and the tubes are  
 twisted and dried,  
 When the oldest colors have faded, and the youngest  
 critic has died,  
 We shall rest, and, faith, we shall need it—lie down for  
 an eon or two,  
 Till the Master of All Good Workmen shall set us to  
 work anew!  
 And only the Master shall praise us, and only the Master  
 shall blame;  
 And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work  
 for fame;  
 But each for the joy of the working, and each, in his  
 separate star,  
 Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of Things  
 as They Are!

*L'Envoi*  
 Rudyard Kipling

Stevenson even wrote his own epitaph:

Under the wide and starry sky  
 Dig the grave and let me lie:  
 Glad did I live and gladly die,  
 And I laid me down with a will.  
 This be the verse you grave for me:  
 Here he lies where he long'd to be;  
 Home is the sailor, home from the sea,  
 And the hunter home from the hill

*Requiem*  
 Robert Louis Stevenson

If possible, don't let a vibrant soul just gradually waste away in an ICU when there is no chance of restoring the patient to a meaningful life. Some years ago the frigate "Constitution," which was nicknamed "Old Ironsides" and had won so many great naval victories in the war of 1812, was going to be allowed to rot away at her moorings. Oliver Wendell Holmes, as a student, was incensed about this and wrote the following:

Ay, Tear her tattered ensign down!  
 Long has it waved on high,  
 And many an eye has danced to see  
 That banner in the sky;  
 Beneath it rung the battle-shout  
 And burst the cannon's roar:  
 The meteor of the ocean air  
 Shall sweep the clouds no more!  
 Her deck, once red with hero's blood,  
 Where knelt the vanquished foe,  
 When winds were hurrying o'er the flood

And waves were white below  
 No more shall feel the victor's tread,  
 Or know the conquered knee:  
 The harpies of the shore shall pluck  
 The eagle of the sea!  
 O better that her shattered hulk  
 Should sink beneath the wave!  
 Her thunders shook the mighty deep,  
 And there should be her grave:  
 Nail to the mast her holy flag,  
 Set every threadbare sail,  
 And give her to the god of storms,  
 The lightning and the gale!

*Old Ironsides*  
 Oliver Wendell Holmes

We should take a positive attitude about life as  
 Wadsworth did:

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,  
 Life is but an empty dream!—  
 For the soul is dead that slumbers,  
 And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!  
 And the grave is not its goal;  
 Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
 Was not spoken of the soul.

In the world's broad field of battle,  
 In the bivouac of life,  
 Be not like dumb, driven cattle!  
 Be a hero in the strife!

Lives of great men all remind us  
 We can make our lives sublime,  
 And, departing, leave behind us  
 Footprints on the sands of time.

Footprints, that perhaps another,  
 Sailing o'er life's solemn main,  
 A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,  
 Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us then be up and doing,  
 With a heart for any fate;  
 Still achieving, still pursuing,  
 Learn to labor and to wait.

*A Psalm of Life*  
 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

We might be inspired as was Patrick Henry to fight  
 some of the Society's battles.

They tell us, Sir, that we are weak—  
 unable to cope with so formidable an adversary.

But when shall we be stronger?  
 Will it be the next week, or the next year?

Our brethren are already in the field!  
 Why stand we here idle?  
 What is it that Gentlemen wish? What would they have?  
 Is life so dear, or peace so sweet,  
 as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?  
 Forbid it, Almighty God!  
 I know not what course others may take;  
 but as for me, give me Liberty or give me death!

The War Inevitable  
 March, 1775  
 Patrick Henry

Churchill provided much of the inspiration for  
 England in its darkest days during World War II. One  
 of his quotations typifies this spirit.

Never give in, never give in, never, never,  
 never, never—in nothing, great or small,  
 Large or petty—never give in except to  
 convictions of honor and good sense.

Address at Harrow School  
 October 29, 1941  
 Sir Winston Spencer Churchill

and, in perhaps one of his most famous quotations—

Let us . . . brace ourselves to our duties,  
 and so bear ourselves that if the British  
 Empire and its Commonwealth last for a  
 thousand years, men will still say: "This  
 was their finest hour."

Radio Broadcast  
 July 14, 1940  
 Sir Winston Spencer Churchill

In closing, I leave you all with this thought.

We have lived and loved together  
 Through many changing years,  
 We have shared each other's gladness  
 And wept each other's tears.

And let us hope the future,  
 As the past has been will be:  
 I will share with thee my sorrows,  
 And thou thy joys with me.

Charles Jefferys

Thank you.