

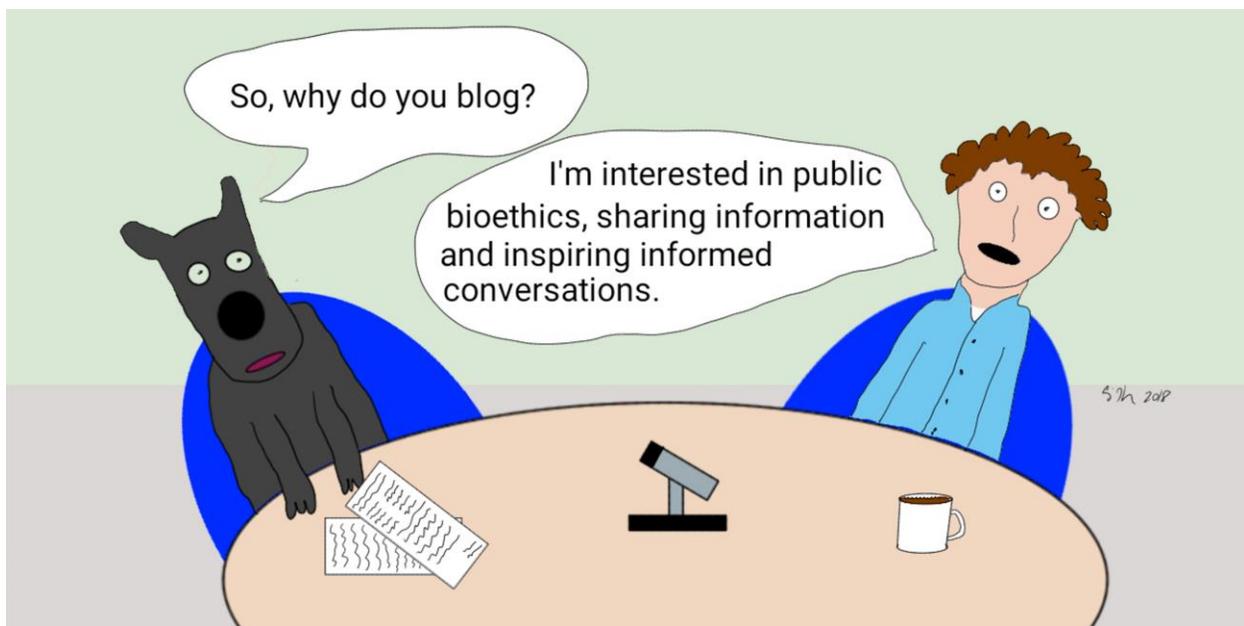
Posted February 6, 2018 at <http://www.bioethics.net/2018/02/300-a-blog-on-blogs/>

300: A Blog on Blogs

by Craig Klugman & Bonsai

This post marks a milestone in my life on this blog—it is my 300th posting at bioethics.net. It has been 61 months since I took over as blog editor at bioethics.net when my first blog premiered in December 2012. I have moved institutions, states, rank, and responsibilities in that time. This means, I have written approximately 330,000 words at an average rate 60 blogs per year, 5 per month and 1.13 per week.

Recently, when I mentioned this anniversary to my dog, Bonsai, she suggested that readers might be interested in learning about blogging and offered to interview me. What follows is a transcript of that conversation.



Bonsai: What is a blog?

CK: A blog is a timely, short essay of 800-1,200 words (though I admit that some have gone as high as 1,600 words) that explores a single topic. Similar to an OpEd, the purpose of a blog is to inform, inspire, and to move people to action. Unlike a traditional academic paper, a blog begins with a hook or a lede to capture the reader's attention, then gives the most important information, and then offers further discussion of the topic. In that sense it is written more like a newspaper article than a research manuscript.

Bonsai: Why did you start blogging?

CK: I had been thinking about it for a year or two before I actually began. I was at the ASBH meeting in 2012 when I half-jokingly mentioned an interest in blogging to [Andrea Kalfoglou](#). She connected me immediately with [David Magnus](#) at the *American Journal of Bioethics* and *bioethics.net* who wanted to reinvigorate the blog. I was interested; David was willing; and so we gave it a go.

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Bonsai: How did you learn how to blog?

The truth is that I didn't. I just sat down and starting writing them. I wasn't even a big reader of blogs before I started with bioethics.net. I did, however, work as a journalist for several years before graduate school and I think those skills transferred really well: Pursuing leads, writing quickly, succinctly, in a focused way and on a short deadline. About two years I ago I was a fellow with the [OpEd Project](#) which helped me to refine my writing in this format and to gain confidence in what I was doing.

Bonsai: Why does the cat stare at my sometimes?

CK: He's jealous that you can talk. Just ignore him.

Bonsai: Why should someone blog rather than write a journal paper that "counts"?

CK: There is something very satisfying about having an idea, reading about it, writing it up, and sharing it with the world in a very short period of time. I often get an idea, write it up, and post it on the same day. Blogs have a timeliness that is hard to capture in a traditional print journal where publication can take months, if not years. Blogs are great places to test an idea that might become something bigger later or to share some thoughts that aren't big enough to be a full manuscript. It's a very experimental medium and allows a closer connection to readers. Plus, with analytics, we know that people read the blogs. Whereas a journal article may be read by a handful of people and cited a few times, the blogs are read by thousands. Also, more and more universities are encouraging community engagement through OpEds and blogs. The [American Sociological Association](#) has even recommended counting social media toward tenure and promotion.

Bonsai: Where do you get your ideas?

I'm frequently worried that I won't have an idea for a blog. Mostly, I find the ideas in current events whether it's a tech breakthrough, a new case, a new policy or bill. Sometimes I write about something happening to me such as going to a conference, teaching a new class, or a topic that my students ask for advice on. Other times, the topics come from serendipity—I'll see a few unrelated articles or stories that come together in my mind as having a common theme and write about that. And sometimes people share with me something that happened to them—that's how the #METOO Bioethics piece came about.

Bonsai: Can I get a new squeaky toy?

CK: You already have a basket full of them that you never play with.

Bonsai: How long does it take you to write a blog?

By the time I sit down, I've usually been thinking about an idea for a few days or a couple of hours. So the idea has been fermenting in my mind for a while. From the time I sit down until the time I post is usually about an hour-and-a-half. I write a first draft; take a break; and then edit.

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Bonsai: What role does blogging play in bioethics? Can you really make a good argument in such a short space?

CK: There are quite a few bioethics blogs out there and bioethics.net has a [bloggregator](#) where we repost a lot of them. I think that the required brevity means that you have to get right to the point and build a really tight argument. There are a lot of concerns over bioethics in the media because a newspaper article or soundbite is extremely short and it's hard to have a nuanced argument in that space. But a blog is more like what Ken Goodman calls *para-ethics* "[in which journalistic constraints are noted but also in which issues and arguments are presented without oversimplification and credible disagreement is given appropriate attention.](#)" There is a big advantage with a blog over a media interview in that the blog allows us to directly speak to the greater public and to control the messaging rather than wondering how our words will be interpreted and what words will be selected for inclusion in an article.

Right now we are living through a period of history in the U.S. where there is a lack of civil discourse and we are speaking into echo chambers. I think bioethics has the power to help people have civil conversations about difficult subjects. As I learned in the OpEd Project, as scholars, we have a lot of knowledge and skills that are useful and necessary for public dialogue—we just have to jump into that pool.

Bonsai: Can I have an extra snack for doing this?

CK: No. Dinner is in an hour and you'll spoil your appetite.

Bonsai: What's the coolest thing that's come out of a blog?

CK: I'm always excited when another website wants to repost a blog. I've gotten a few national media interviews over a blog that a reporter or producer has come across. But I think the coolest thing is when a colleague at another school tells me that they've used a blog in class or cited it in an article or book. Basically, it's nice to know that someone is actually reading them and thinking about the ideas.

Bonsai: What's up with the comics?

Back in October, bioethics.net and *AJOB* decided to be more involved with Graphic Medicine in the journal and on the website. We also learned that when we post things on social media, they are more likely to draw eyeballs if there is a graphic image. Given the rapidity with which we post blogs, getting permissions for existing imagery would take too much time and require a greater budget than the \$0 that I work with. I've had the good fortune of spending time with Graphic Medicine artist and scholar [MK Czerwiec](#) over the last few years and she's guest-lectured in several of my classes. She's inspired me to do some occasional drawing. So it all just came together. Each comic can take longer to create than the blog they accompany. Why, do you like them?

Bonsai: I don't know. I'm a dog, I can't read and I only see in black and white. Can we go for a walk, like now?

CK: Let me grab my coat.