

COMING SOON
Holiday and
Anniversary Issues

Healthcare Marketer's

Exchange

"Where Healthcare Marketers Connect"

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Gratitude at the Heart of THANKSGIVING



Celebrating the People, Opportunities,
and Support That Make Our
Journey Meaningful

Diane Carpenteri
HealthCom Media
and Wolters Kluwer

Gerardo Heredia
CMI Media Group

Laura Johnson
Directorie

Brett Marvel
Merck

John M. Shattuck
PDQ Communications, Inc.

Caty Smith
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John Wilson
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PERSONAL EXCHANGE WITH
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Dear Healthcare Marketer,

While Thanksgiving may be mostly celebrated on one day, I've decided to dedicate this whole month to gratitude. I'm making a conscious effort to share my thanks for all life has brought me and to take a moment to let the people I love know just how much I appreciate having them in my life.

As I plan for the next chapter – retirement – I can't help but look back on the many people who have been part of my journey.

First and foremost, I am grateful for my family, especially my mom and dad. They supported my decision to open my own business, even when there were doubters and easier paths in front of me. They believed in me and gave me the confidence to take a chance on myself. That decision ultimately allowed me to build a life I never could have imagined – and to become a single mom to two beautiful girls who are truly my world.

I am also incredibly grateful for the many friends and colleagues in the healthcare industry who helped me launch *The Exchange* and have been there every step of the way. What started as a business became so much more – a community, deep friendships, memories, and a career that has given me 35 amazing years.

And then there is my tribe of friends. I am so lucky to have people in my life who have been there through every chapter – people who listened to me, laughed with me, supported me, and helped me navigate all of life's ups and downs. Some have even worked alongside me!

This month is also extra special because my daughters are treating me to a trip to Las Vegas to celebrate my 65th birthday and my upcoming retirement. Watching them plan the trip together has been one of the best parts. They have grown into incredible women and, somewhere along the way, they became my friends, too.

One highlight will be going to the Sphere to see the Eagles. I am beyond excited – not just for the concert, but for the memories we will make together. These are the moments I want to hold onto. And then there's Nashville with my childhood besties. Our trip was canceled last month when flights were halted at Newark Airport, so the photo above is from the trip that wasn't – but soon will be! We're drinking \$33 espresso martinis at the airport bar, waiting for our flight to take off – but it never did.

This issue is a celebration of the many reasons we all have to be thankful. On the work front, **Gerardo Heredia** (CMI Media Group) shares his journey from future dreams that once seemed impossible to a recent promotion far surpassing what he imagined. **Caty Smith** (Amgen) appreciates the "bus" she's been on throughout her career but is most thankful for the people who have been on that bus with her. **John Wilson** (Sanofi) heralds Dolly – yes, that Dolly – for the lessons she's taught us about prioritizing how we make others feel over our professional accomplishments.

When it comes to personal pursuits, **Brett Marvel** (Merck) is thankful his creative outlet has led him to become a published author with the release of his first novel, *The Last Promise*. Thanksgiving is **Diane Carpenteri's** (HealthCom Media and Wolters Kluwer) favorite holiday, and she stretches out the festivities with an annual Friendsgiving gathering. For **John M. Shattuck's** (PDQ Communications, Inc.) family, Thanksgiving marks the beginning of the holiday season, including their annual "Woody competition." It wouldn't be Thanksgiving without at least one recipe. **Laura Johnson** (Directorie) shares her delicious Sweet Potato Casserole, with a twist and a challenge. And we're thankful to **Elsa Varghese, M.D.** (Abelson-Taylor Group), for giving us a glimpse into her life through this month's *Personal Exchange*.

As I look toward retirement and whatever comes next, I have so much to be thankful for. A career I built, a business I poured my heart into, incredible friends, an amazing industry that has given me so many relationships, and, most of all, two daughters who make me proud every single day. As I prepare for this next chapter, I hope to find the right person or company to carry *HME* forward – someone who will embrace the community we've built and continue the connections, stories, and friendships that have brought me so much joy over the years.

So, this Thanksgiving, I'm saying it out loud:

Thank you. Thank you for being part of my journey, for believing in me, for making me laugh, and for supporting me. I am grateful for every chapter that brought me here – and very excited for the next one.

Hope you will celebrate 35 years with us by contributing editorially and with advertising support. See page 13.

Happy Thanksgiving to you and yours,

Nancy Leonard

Publisher, *Healthcare Marketer's Exchange*

WIN! \$100 DICK'S Sporting Goods Gift Card* PARTICIPATE IN OUR SPORTS ISSUE!

We're highlighting the thrilling world of sports! Share the events, stories, and moments that make it unforgettable.

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- Game-day traditions: favorite recipes, watch parties, or unforgettable live-game experiences
- Sports travel adventures: trips inspired by sporting events or iconic venues, from visiting every Major League ballpark to traveling to see your favorite team play



Contact Nancy at NALeonard@HMEExchange.com or 973-420-1192 for more information or to send in your submission. Send in your submission by December 1 and you could win a \$100 gift card. *Winner selected in a random drawing of all participants.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ONWARD&UPWARD

promotions • additions

21 GRAMS has announced the appointment of **Crystal Stein** as SVP, Strategy.

A.L.L. Global Media Solutions has announced the addition of **Sean Curley** to its Analytics team.

Amgen has announced the appointments of **Melissa Moore Rutz** as Senior Manager, Omnichannel Engagement Orchestration for Repatha, and **Tyler Truong** as Senior Manager, Omnichannel Search, GEO and AI Answer Engine.

AstraZeneca has announced the appointment of **Gina Padula** as Senior Marketing Director, Respiratory Biologics, and **Ryan Goldfarb** as Director, Lifecycle Marketing – Immunology.

Avalere Health has announced the appointment of **Denise Escobar** as VP, Talent Development.

Bristol Myers Squibb has announced the appointment of **Claire Gillespie** as Executive Director, Neuroscience Communications.

Butler/Till has announced the appointment of **Rachel Smith** as Director, Integrated Planning.

Calcium+Company has announced the promotion of **Taylor Righter** to SVP, Group Creative Director.

CMI Media Group has announced the promotions of **Evan Funchion** to Supervisor; **Nicole Grossbaum** (ngrossbaum@cmimediagroup.com) to Supervisor of Engagement Strategy; **Marisa Blackwell** to Associate Director, SEM; and the appointment of **Ross Gelches** as Senior Vice President, Campaign Management and Execution; and **Bobbie Thorn** as Director on the Innovation Team.

CultHealth, An Indegene Company, has announced the appointment of **Colin Jakiel** as Account Supervisor.

Deerfield Group has announced the appointment of **Ellen Homayack** as VP, Client Services.

Envision Pharma Group has announced the promotion of **Scott Navitsky** (scott.navitsky@envisionpharma.com) to Senior Director of Business Development and Sales.

EVERSANA INTOUCH has announced the promotion of **Justin Hynes** (jphynes6130@gmail.com) to Associate Director of PMO, and the return of **Lanie Keller** as Social Media Manager.

FCB Health New York announced the promotion of **Nicole Cutrone** to Account Director.

Fingerpaint Group has announced the promotion of **Liz Kelly** to Vice President, Program Management, and the appointment of **Christa Gomez** as Account Director.

Gilead Sciences has announced the appointment of **John Burstow** as Associate Director, Marketing – Liver Disease.

Havas has announced the appointment of **Jackie Jay** as EVP, Client Services.

Havas Media Network has announced the appointment of **Sattakshi Tripathi** as Assistant Manager – Performance Marketing.

Healthcasts has announced the promotion of **Peter Insdorf** to Executive Vice President, Business Development.

Heartbeat has announced the promotion of **Claudia Jáquez** to Media Supervisor.

Impiricus has announced the promotion of **Savannah Wade** to Senior Client Services Manager and the appointment of **Jeff Eaton** as Senior Vice President, Strategic Growth.

Indegene has announced the appointment of **Claire Phillips** as Senior Director, Pfizer PAVE Oncology Portfolio Strategy Lead.

Initiative has announced the appointment of **Liv Tarone** as Director, Client Advice and Management, and the promotion of **Ashley Lindner** (ashley.lindner@omc.com) to Associate Director, Communications Design HCP.

Inizio Evoke has announced the appointment of **Jackie Chan** as Media Supervisor.

International Healthcare Media, LLC, has announced the promotion of **Jacqueline Braida** to Digital Media Manager.

KINESSO has announced the appointment of **Téa Simon** as Manager, Paid Social.

Klick has announced the appointment of **Maddy Wright** as VP, Group Account Director, and **Erica Nardello** as VP, Group Director, Strategy. **Ali Donato** has been promoted to Vice President, Strategy.

MDCalc has announced the appointments of **Bill Glah** (bill.glah@mdcalc.com) as Executive Director, Business Development, and **Ryan Olohan** (ryan.oloan@mdcalc.com) as Head of Sales.

Merck has announced the promotion of **Lynne Minter** (lynne_minter@merck.com) to Executive Director, Media and Content.

Moon Rabbit has announced the appointment of **Jennifer Follo** as Associate Director of Strategy and **Leticya Liszkiewicz** as Director, Talent Acquisition.

Novartis has announced the appointment of **Joanna Forbes** as Associate Director, Delivery Enablement.

Olixir US has announced the promotion of **Jessica Roth** to VP, Account Director.

OMD has announced the appointment of **Cristeen Sathu** (cristeen.sathu@omc.com) as Director, Integrated Media Planning.

Omicom Health has announced the appointment of **Mary Pace** as Managing Director, Head of Talent, and **Joseph De Angelis** (DeAngelis.Joseph@gmail.com) as VP, Management Director.

Omnicom Media has announced the appointment of **Lisbeth Sosa** (sosalisbeth65@gmail.com) as Associate Director, Communications Design.

Phreesia Network Solutions has announced the promotions of **Alexa Mazzilli** and **Anna DeSario** to Senior Client Experience Managers and **Laura Thornton-Smith** to Lead Client Experience Manager.

Pfizer has announced the appointment of **Mandi Rollerson** as Director, AI Change and Adoption Lead, Chief Marketing Officer.

Publicis Health has announced the appointment of **Antonio Pradas** (antonio.pradas17@gmail.com) as Group Account Supervisor; **Anissa Roper** as Associate Director of Strategy; **Lara Paikoff** as Associate Director, Partner Direct; **Liam Sullivan** as Associate Director, Strategy; **Suhani Upadhyaya** (suhani19@gmail.com) as Senior Associate on the Partner Direct Team; **Lily D'Angelo** as Associate Director of Strategy; **Caralyn Reiff** as Vice President, Customer Experience; and **Megan Kebliss** as Associate Director, Paid Search. Promoted at the company were **Sydney Sandak** to Associate Director of Strategy; **Valerie Voswinkel** to Director, Strategy; **Meghan Stevens** to Associate Director, Business Intelligence; **Alexander Barrett** to Director, Point of Care; **Chassity Adams** (chassity.adams@phm.com) to Associate Director, Paid Social; **Michael Klemens** to Vice President; **Holly Edwards** to Supervisor, Paid Search; and **Lily D'Angelo** to Associate Director, Strategy.

Razorfish has announced the appointment of **Jessica Freeswick** as Media Planner.

Real Chemistry has announced the appointment of **Alex Fiore** (afiore@realchemistry.com) as Senior Group Director, Paid Search (Dept Lead).

REMEDY EDGE NY has announced the promotion of **Lexi Petrakis** to Account Supervisor.

RevHealth has announced the appointment of **Nicole Dritsas** as Associate Director of Project Management.

SOLVE(D) has announced the promotion of **Samantha Thompson** to Paid Social Senior Specialist and **Nicole Urso** to Supervisor.

Syneos Health has announced the appointment of **Camille Proulx** as Associate Media Director of the Evolvic Team.

The Bloc has announced the appointment of **Alden Boldt** (aboldt@thebloc.com) as SVP, Director of Growth.

The HWP Group (Health and Wellness Partners, LLC) has announced the appointment of **Sophie Blais Banspach** as Associate Vice President, Medical Communications and Engagement.

NEW&NOTEWORTHY

awards • mergers • approvals

CMI Media Group and **Compas** have been named to the **2026 Best Workplaces in Advertising & Marketing List** by **Fortune Media** and **Great Place to Work**.

AstraZeneca has received accelerated FDA approval of Etcamah (camizestrant) with a CDK4/6 inhibitor for ESR1-Mutated (HR)-positive, HER2-negative locally advanced or metastatic breast cancer.

Ultragenyx has received FDA approval for a first-in-disease gene therapy, **Fayuvi**, for a rare neurodegenerative disorder.



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Giving Thanks

Lessons From Dolly

BY JOHN WILSON

"It's nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice."

I was thinking about this quote today considering the recent passing of Dolly Parton.

Very few people will achieve the level of fame, success, and influence Dolly did. But when you hear people talk about her, the words that seem to come up repeatedly aren't famous, successful, or even talented.

Kind. Generous. Humble. Genuine.

Dolly became important to the world, but she never seemed to lose sight of the importance of simply being good to people.

In our careers, it's easy to get caught up in titles, responsibilities, accomplishments, and being the person in the room whose opinion carries weight. And there's nothing wrong with wanting to be successful or to make an impact.

But over time, I've come to believe that how you make people feel matters just as much as what you accomplish. Because how you treat people stays with them.

Be the person

- Who gives credit.
- Who makes time for others.
- Who treats people with respect – regardless of their title.
- Who leaves a room having made it a little better, not just having made themselves look important.

Titles change. Organizations change. Careers change.

Being a good person never goes out of style.

Dolly Parton left the world brighter than she found it.

That's a legacy.

Rest in peace, Dolly.



John Wilson is Director, Oncology Marketing, Sanofi. He can be reached at 610-761-0781 or John.Wilson@sanofi.com.

TIME FOR FRIENDSGIVING

BY DIANE CARPENTERI

Hands down, my favorite holiday is Thanksgiving. I like to refer to it as the "no-nonsense" holiday. Time to reflect on food, family, friends, college football, nap (in that order). When an opportunity arises to stretch the holiday out, I'm all in!

Friendsgiving, for the past few years, has become the official extended Thanksgiving holiday tradition. Celebrated a few weeks before Thanksgiving, Friendsgiving serves up a smorgasbord of homemade holiday dishes and desserts.



Praying that the Friendsgiving calories don't find us.



Each friend contributes a transportable side dish, salad, appetizer, or

Always a fun and goofy picture.

dessert. The table is set with linens, china, silverware, wine glasses, and flowers – a special table for special people. If we are eating that many calories, it needs to be fancy.

The conversation is always full of laughs and sometimes "naughty" talk. We'll play a board game and sometimes do an arts and crafts project. (Unfortunately, my selection of pictures does not include every friend that has attended over the past few years –

but they know who they are!)

There are not enough days of the year to give thanks for friendships I will always cherish, and memories that will last a lifetime. I am truly blessed!



Diane Carpenteri is Associate Publisher, HealthCom Media and Wolters Kluwer. She can be reached at 203-253-7935 (cell) or dcarpenteri@healthcommedia.com.



Thanksgiving Recipes

In Defense of Pecans: A Thanksgiving Recipe Worth Fighting For

BY LAURA JOHNSON

Every family has a hill to die on at Thanksgiving. Mine is sweet potato casserole. My chosen battle: no marshmallows.

This recipe came from my parents, and I introduced it to my husband's table the same way you'd introduce any strongly held opinion to new in-laws. Gently at first, then with total confidence once the first pan disappeared. As a previously marshmallow household, they were officially converted and it has been the casserole on our table every year since. I hope one day it's the dish that lures my boy's home for holidays and its smell ignites the holiday nostalgia.

Here's my case for the defense. Marshmallows turn sweet potatoes into a sticky dessert that never maintains the right texture. A brown sugar and pecan topping does something different. It adds crunch and a little bit of caramelized bitterness. This actually balances the natural sweetness underneath, instead of piling more on top. The potatoes stay the star. The topping just gives them a proper finish.

This recipe has survived every holiday gathering, multiple moves across state lines (and back), and more than one skeptical relative who showed up expecting marshmallows and left asking for the recipe. The measurements and method below are the same, I've just filled in a few details that used to live only in my head.

Sweet Potato Casserole

FOR THE POTATOES

4 cups baked and mashed sweet potatoes, skins removed
(about 4 to 5 medium sweet potatoes)

½ cup sugar
2 large eggs
½ cup milk
½ tsp. salt



My family – husband, Ben, and sons, Beckett and Ford.

5 tbsp. butter, melted
(about ⅓ of a standard stick)

1 tsp. vanilla extract

FOR THE TOPPING

1 cup brown sugar, packed
½ cup all-purpose flour
5 tbsp. butter, melted
1 cup pecans, roughly chopped

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 2-quart baking dish.
2. In a large bowl, mix the sweet potatoes, sugar, eggs, milk, salt, melted butter, and vanilla until well combined. Pour into the prepared baking dish and smooth the top.
3. In a separate bowl, combine the brown sugar, flour, melted butter, and pecans. Mix until it forms a crumbly texture. Then scatter it evenly over the potato mixture.
4. Bake uncovered for 35 to 45 minutes, until the topping is golden brown and the edges are bubbling.
5. Let the casserole rest for 10 minutes before serving. This gives it time to set so it holds its shape when you serve it.

A few notes from experience:

- Save yourself and bake and mash the sweet potatoes a day ahead and keep them refrigerated.
- Even better, the full dish can be assembled a day in advance, covered, and refrigerated. Add about 5 to 10 minutes to the bake time if it goes into the oven cold.
- If the topping is browning too quickly before the potatoes are set, tent the dish with foil for the last 10 minutes.

Whichever side of the marshmallow debate you land on, I hope this earns a spot on your table this year. And, if it starts an argument, just tell them I said it's worth having.



Obligatory holiday picture.



Laura Johnson is Senior Director, Client Excellence, Directorie. She can be reached at ljohnson@directorie.com.

Life Is Like a Bus Ride

BY CATY SMITH

Several weeks ago, Caty Smith shared this reflection on LinkedIn. And we asked to share it here.

Yesterday was my first day in more than 15 years that I was no longer an AstraZeneca employee.

I spent the morning with a cup of coffee and a few books. I was revisiting *Good to Great*, and one section stood out to me...The author, Jim Collins, argues that great companies and a great life aren't defined by where the bus goes, but by who you're on the bus with.

And I thought: *Well, I've been incredibly lucky with my bus.*

It's a privilege to work in an industry that changes lives. But to do that work alongside people I genuinely love and respect, many of whom I now count among my closest friends, has been the greatest privilege of all.

NOT TAKING OURSELVES TOO SERIOUSLY

When I think about the last 15 years, of course I remember the launches, the challenges, the impossible deadlines, and the work we're all incredibly proud of. But I also remember the big belly laughs, coffees, karaoke, arts and crafts, dancing, cartwheels in the lobby, Office Olympics, and more than a few travel adventures.

Which brings me to the mug in this photo. It's a simple mug covered in scenes from Sweden, given to me by my cross-functional team during a particularly intense work week in Gothenburg. Along with it came an unofficial award for "Best Attitude." Of all the recognition I've received over the years, it remains one of my favorites.

Because it reminds me of something I hope I never forget: we can take the work incredibly seriously without taking ourselves too seriously.

And maybe, more importantly, the best teams give people the space to be authentically themselves. To challenge each other. To admit when they don't know. To laugh – a lot. To show up for each other when life gets hard. And to bring all the wonderfully imperfect things that make us human to the work we do together.

Like Mr. Collins – I've come to believe who we're with is not separate from high performance. It's what makes high performance possible.

THANKS FOR BEING ON THE BUS WITH ME

So to everyone who has been on this bus with me, past and present, thank you. Thank you for the work, the

laughter, the friendship, the candor, the support, and 15 years of memories I will carry with me for a very long time.

Now it's time to get on a new bus. I'm excited to share more about this next adventure. But for now, I'm just incredibly grateful for everyone who made this ride so extraordinary.

ABOUT THAT BUS...

At the time I wrote the first part of this article on LinkedIn, I hadn't revealed my next adventure...

Now, I'm incredibly excited to share that I've joined Amgen as Vice President and General Manager, U.S. Bone Health. Sometimes a new leap can feel like jumping into completely unknown waters. This one feels a little more like stepping from one boat to another, especially when you already know quite a few of the people on deck.

After many years of partnering with Amgen, joining the company has been (un)surprisingly familiar. There have been reunions with old friends, lots of new faces, and an immediate sense of the amazing culture that made this opportunity so exciting to me in the first place. I've also had the chance to start getting to know the U.S. Bone Health team and see firsthand all they've accomplished. The track record speaks for itself, but what has struck me just as much is the talent, passion, and teamwork behind that success. I feel incredibly lucky to be joining them in what comes next.

And when the work we undertake can make such a meaningful difference in patients' lives, I believe that success gives us permission to be even more ambitious about the future, to stay curious, ask bigger questions, challenge what we think is possible, and keep raising the bar together.

After 15 awesome years at AstraZeneca, joining a new company is equal parts exciting, energizing, and a little surreal, but I couldn't be happier about my new home.

New company. New therapeutic area. New team. Lots to learn. I can't wait to see where we take this bus next!



Grateful for 15 years and everyone on the bus.



My "Best Attitude" award; a favorite keepsake.



Caty Smith is Vice President and General Manager, U.S. Bone Health, Amgen. She can be reached at catyprice@gmail.com or www.linkedin.com/in/caty-smith.



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Gratitude for Doors That Opened Along the Way

BY GERARDO HEREDIA

I've been thinking lately about Begonias Street in San Isidro, Lima, Peru.

Years ago, after university classes or interviews nearby, I would take long walks through Lima, trying to understand what my future might look like. Those walks would take me to Begonias Street in Lima's financial district. I remember looking at the office buildings and quietly imagining what it would be like to work inside them.

I came from a modest family, was taking longer than expected to finish school, and was searching for opportunities without a clear map into the professional world. At the time, those buildings seemed to belong to another life – one far removed from my reality.

CLOSING THE GAP

The distance between Begonias Street and where I am today is not only geographic. It is the distance between seeing a place as beyond your reach and eventually discovering that it can be the beginning of something much greater.

I grew up in a loving family, although our circumstances were not always simple. Resources were limited. I learned early to adapt, make the most of what was available, and keep moving when plans changed.

OPENING THE DOOR TO EDUCATION

In Peru, admission to public universities is highly competitive. Thousands of students compete for a limited number of places, and many prepare for two or three years at specialized academies. I did not have access to that kind of preparation.

With my aunt's support, I studied largely on my own while working. I relied on books, repetition, and whatever helped me concentrate. I discovered that classical music helped me work through difficult math problems.

Passing the entrance exam on my first attempt was a proud moment for my family and for me. I became the first of my siblings to enter a public university. More than an academic achievement, it showed me that a difficult beginning did not necessarily determine my destination.

THE MEDIA DOOR OPENS

Getting into university was only the beginning. I worked while studying and faced financial pressure, health challenges, and limited guidance. My education took longer than expected, and there were moments when I questioned whether I had made the right choice.

During my walks past Begonias Street, I would see people dressed for work and feel both inspired and discouraged. I wanted that life, but it still felt far away. Eventually, a friend from college who believed in me advocated for me until I received an opportunity at one of Peru's leading media outlets – on Begonias Street itself.

I had spent years imagining what it would be like to work in one of those buildings. Then, suddenly, I was walking into one. What I had thought would be the destination became the beginning of my career

in media. I built experience in advertising and media, developed meaningful relationships, and began to see myself not only as someone waiting for a chance, but as someone with something valuable to offer.

It also taught me how much one person's belief can matter. Sometimes a door opens because someone is willing to say, "Give this person a chance."

OVERCOMING HURDLES IN THE UNITED STATES

I moved to build a life with my spouse and, personally, the move brought me a kind of happiness I could not have imagined. Together, we have created a loving life, bought a house, got a dog, and gained a loving extended family.

Professionally, however, starting over was difficult. Because of my immigration process, I had to wait about a year and a half for work authorization. During that time,



Gerardo's Family in Peru.



Gerardo and spouse, Joe.

(Continued on page 11)

Gratitude *(Continued from page 10)*

I was separated from my family, unable to return to Peru, and dependent on my spouse. Recruiters began reaching out, but I could not accept the opportunities.

Once I was able to work, I had to rebuild my career in another language, culture, and market. My accent and nervousness sometimes made it difficult to communicate the full extent of my experience. There were moments I wondered whether I would ever find my way back to the career I had built in Peru.

The pandemic interrupted promising opportunities, and I eventually took jobs outside of media while continuing to search. I was grateful for the work, but there were times when I felt I had returned to the precarious reality I had spent years trying to escape. One of those jobs involved long periods in a freezer, and in time my body began to struggle. I learned there is dignity in doing what is necessary to survive, but survival and fulfillment are not the same thing.

THE DOOR BACK TO MEDIA

In 2021, CMI Media Group gave me the opportunity to return to media. Returning to the field was exciting, but it was also humbling. I had to learn a new industry and a new vocabulary. In the beginning, I was so insecure that I even questioned whether I really spoke English.

What made the difference was the people around me. Leaders and teammates trusted me with more responsibility, challenged me to grow, and gave me room to learn. Their support helped me realize I was not starting from nothing. I was bringing my experience, adaptability, perspective, and resilience with me. My career took an unexpected turn, but everything I learned along the way still mattered.

ONE DOOR LEADS TO ANOTHER

Today, I am proud to share that I have been promoted to Associate Director, Engagement Strategy, at CMI Media Group. I work at the World Trade Center in Manhattan's Financial District – it's a much larger version of the dream I once associated with Begonias Street. The irony is I once thought Begonias Street was as far as I could dream. I eventually got there. Then life took me to an even bigger version of that dream.

This promotion feels deeply personal. It represents more than a title. It represents the education I worked hard to pursue, the career I had to rebuild, and the many times I had to begin again. It also represents the sacrifices and hardships that followed my move to the United States:



Gerardo's pet, Donatella.

leaving my family, missing important moments in their lives, waiting for work authorization, rebuilding in another language and market, and continuing through uncertainty when the path I had built no longer seemed visible.

For a long time, I felt I was falling behind. I watched people around me move forward while I was starting over, trying to prove that my experience still mattered. There were periods of loneliness, homesickness, rejection, and personal experiences that took a lasting toll. Still, I stayed focused. I kept working, learning, and looking for the next opportunity, even when progress was difficult to see.

This promotion gives me perspective on those years. It does not erase the sacrifices or make the difficult moments less difficult, but it reminds me that starting over was not the same as starting from nothing. I carried my experience, ambition, adaptability, and resilience with me.

It also represents the life I have now: meaningful work, a happy marriage, and the freedom to travel to places I once could not imagine reaching. I get to see the world with the person I love and share a life I didn't even imagine during those long walks through Lima.

WHAT I'D TELL YOUNGER ME

I still have moments of insecurity about my accent and how I am perceived. Growth has not erased those feelings; it has taught me not to let them decide what I attempt. Sometimes I think about that younger version of myself walking through Lima, hoping life would eventually open a door. I would tell him that the road would be longer than expected, with rejection, uncertainty, sacrifice, and moments when he felt behind.

I would also tell him that he would meet people who saw his potential, build a life filled with love and possibility, and discover that he did not need to have everything figured out before taking the next step. One door opened in Lima. Another opened in the United States. In truth, life has offered a series of many open doors.

MANY THANKS

I am deeply grateful to everyone who advocated for me, mentored me, challenged me, supported me, and believed in my growth along the way.

Now, when I walk through Manhattan's Financial District, I no longer wonder whether I belong there. I think about how far I have come – and how the place I once thought was the dream turned out to be only the beginning.



Gerardo Heredia is Associate Director, Engagement Strategy, CMI Media Group. He can be reached at 646-840-0717, 215-252-5944 (Direct), or gcavero@cmimediagroup.com.

The Unfolding of THE LAST PROMISE

BY BRETT MARVEL

Growing up, I always had a creative outlet. As a kid, it was drawing and writing short stories. In high school and through college, it was writing and playing music. But the older I got, the busier life became, and the less time I dedicated to that part of myself.

A few years ago, I decided to get back into writing. Only this time, I wanted to write my first novel. It was something I had always wanted to do but had never made the time for.

INSPIRATION BEHIND THE STORY

When I first began writing *The Last Promise*, I knew I wanted to tell a story focused on parenthood and the lengths we are willing to go for our children. Survival and post-apocalyptic fiction had always interested me as well, but not necessarily because of the destruction or the familiar genre conventions. What interested me most was how people chose to move forward after the world ended and what kind of person they became and what could still make survival worthwhile.

That became the foundation for the novel I wanted to write. *The Last Promise* follows a father, Elias, and his young daughter, Sophie, seven years after a global catastrophe has left the world cold, gray, and nearly unrecognizable. When the book begins, they are nearing the end of their rope.

On the surface, it is a survival story. However, I have never really thought of it that way. There is danger, violence, loss, and the constant threat of what people become throughout the story. But beneath all that, *The Last Promise* is about a father trying to keep his word and keep his daughter safe.

A PROMISE DRIVES THE STORY

Years earlier, as Sophie's mother was dying shortly after giving birth to her and the world around them was beginning to collapse, Elias promised he would keep their daughter safe no matter what happened. After everything falls apart, that promise becomes the thing that guides nearly every decision he makes.

Parenthood is filled with promises. We promise to protect our children, prepare them for the world, and be there when they need us. That interested me far more than the mechanics of a conventional post-apocalyptic story. The danger of that type of world is still very real in my story, but I wanted it to be tied to emotional weight

rather than spectacle. I wanted to explore a parent's grief, loneliness, anger, hope, and what remains important after ordinary life has been stripped away.

LEARNING ALONG THE WAY

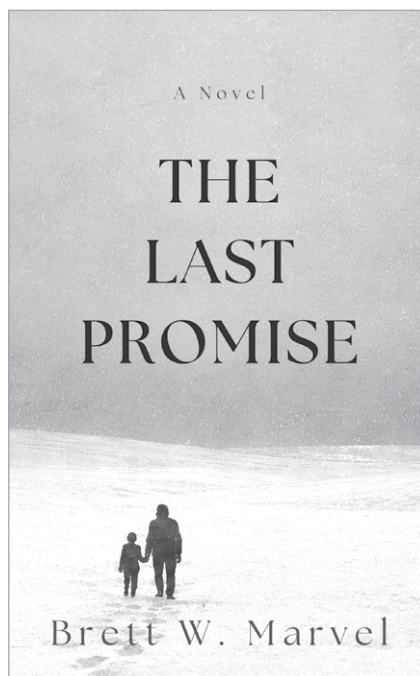
Writing the novel also became an exercise in allowing myself to be inexperienced. I did not begin because I thought I was particularly good at writing fiction. I began because I wanted to tell this story. Much of the process involved learning as I went, reading about the craft, talking with other independent authors online, and working with both a developmental editor and a line editor. There were plenty of moments when I realized something I had written did not work.

JUST BEGIN

That may be one of the biggest things I took away from the experience. You do not have to wait until you are great at something to begin. Sometimes you begin because you are not great at it yet!

Writing *The Last Promise* gave me something I had been missing for years: a creative outlet. But it also reminded me of how much satisfaction can come from being willing to start at the beginning again, to be uncomfortable, and to learn.

If you are interested in reading my book, you can find it on Amazon in paperback and Kindle. <https://a.co/d/03Z5ljAM>.



Brett Marvel is Director, Merck, US Marketing, HPV Franchise. He can be reached at brettwmarvel@gmail.com.

Giving Thanks

Holiday Traditions

BY JOHN M. SHATTUCK

Thanksgiving in the Shattuck household marks the beginning of our holiday season. It starts with our Thanksgiving family celebration – we work all day to put the best feast together and everybody shares in the preparation. We sit around our dining room table and each person tells what they are thankful for. Then it's feast, cleanup, more football, and sleep.

TIME FOR THE TREE

The day after Thanksgiving loomed even larger with our kids (especially when they were really young). Everybody would bundle up. I'd grab some rope, my bow saw (with a fresh blade), old sheets, and a tarp for the ground. Then everyone piled into the car (dog included) and we're off in search of the perfect Christmas tree. Interestingly – when I was thinking this story through – I remembered my dad started this tradition when I was a kid in Colorado Springs. He'd bundle my sister, brother, and me, along with Mom, into our station wagon and we'd drive up into the Rockies. We'd search for a likely tree and he'd cut it down (no tree farm back then).

A WOODY COMPETITION

But wait – there's more!

Cutting down the Christmas tree the day after Thanksgiving was also the start of our holiday season long "Woody" competition. Usually, it was the guys versus the girls – but that changed pretty often. Anytime one of us would see a car with a Christmas tree on the roof, sticking

out of the trunk, in the bed of a pickup, etc., you'd call out, "Woody!" And you had to be fast and loud.

We perfected the rules as the years went by. The trees had to be moving (can't call them in the Christmas tree parking lot or a gas station or a Dunkin' drive-through). If you call a Woody and it's not a tree (we've called lots of Thule carriers), you get dinged a point. Multiple trees on the roof equaled multiple points. You need a member of the opposing team in the car as a witness (no singular sightings). And the competition lasts all the way up to Christmas! The winnings? Full bragging rights until the next year!

Of course, finding, cutting, carrying, and finally – lashing the tree to the car – is all part of the fun, not to mention setting up the tree once it's home. But that's another story (and rated "Adults Only" because of the use of strong language).



Hunting Christmas Trees.



Older Courtney and JC.



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Elsa Varghese, M.D.

Marital Status: Married

Children: 1

Job Title: Medical Strategy Director

Years in Industry: 14

College: SUNY Albany

"It doesn't matter how slowly you go as long as you don't stop."



WHO IS YOUR MENTOR AND HOW DID HE/SHE IMPACT YOU?

I wouldn't say I had a single mentor. Instead, it was a collection of people who gave me nuggets of insight throughout my professional journey. They were GI, internal medicine, and primary care doctors, as well as executives and incredible game designers who designed the games that have become household names. I've learned how to excel, what truly deserves focus, and how to keep moving forward with purpose.

WHAT ARE TWO THINGS ON YOUR BUCKET LIST?

A. Travel as much as I can and create experiences that are truly memorable for my family.

B. See the Himalayas. I don't need to climb them, but I've always been fascinated by the region and the culture surrounding it. This is top on my bucket list of things to do.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE YOU HAVE OVERCOME?

Worrying about what others think. Letting go of that concern allowed me to take more confident risks, contribute more openly, and grow both professionally and personally.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?

My first job was as a telemarketer during my senior year of high school, calling New Jersey residents to subscribe to "The Star Ledger." It was an unexpected but valuable learning experience that gave me early insight into human behavior. Most notably, the importance of timing (never call during dinner).

WHAT WOULD BE THE TITLE OF YOUR LIFE?

"Dust Yourself Off and Try Again." Challenges are an inevitable part of life, and I've learned that resilience matters more than control. When you give your best effort and keep moving forward, things tend to align in meaningful ways.

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED IN THE INDUSTRY?

I got my start at Level Ex, now a part of Snke, Inc., during a pivotal moment. The company was redefining education by creating interactive experiences for physicians combining realistic visuals with risk-free learning. That experience led me to work with high-profile organizations, from major pharma companies to TRISH and NASA and, ultimately, to AbelsonTaylor. Across each role, my focus, whether it's for astronauts or industry, remains the same: understanding real knowledge gaps and translating credible science into engaging, emotionally resonant solutions.

WHAT THREE ADJECTIVES BEST DESCRIBE YOU?

Resilient, collaborative, and curious. Transitioning from the clinical and academic world into advertising required a learning curve, and resilience played a key role in adapting and suc-

ceeding. Working with multidisciplinary teams and high-profile partners like NASA/TRISH reinforced the value of collaboration, while curiosity continues to drive deeper understanding and uncover insights that shape stronger solutions.

WHAT IS THE LAST GOOD BOOK YOU'VE READ?

"When Breath Becomes Air" by Paul Kalanithi. It really puts life into perspective, and I needed that.

DO YOU HAVE ANY HOBBIES?

Dancing! Specifically, Bharatanatyam, a classical Indian dance form and one of the oldest in India. I've had the privilege of performing for diverse audiences, including on Chicago Park District stages as part of the city's cultural diversity initiatives.

WHAT WOULD YOU TELL YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

Stop doubting and shrinking yourself and trust that you already know your capabilities. Playing it safe and trying to fit into a predefined mold limited opportunities that could have come from taking risks. I'd encourage her to take the leap, act with confidence, and trust that support will follow in ways she couldn't yet see.

WHAT ONE LITTLE THING ALWAYS MAKES YOU HAPPY, OTHER THAN YOUR FAMILY?

A good book, hot chocolate, and a plate of a variety of assorted petit sandwiches, uninterrupted on a rainy day. Even the thought of this puts me in a good mood.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD A BRUSH WITH FAME?

I was invited to audition as a co-star for the Disney show, "Deli Boys." Clearly, my audition was not co-star material, but I was invited to film the pilot with the Golden Globe-winning director, Nisha Ganatra, on set anyway. I got to meet the cast and perform with them, which was an incredibly fun experience, though I'm happily sticking to the medical world.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SERIES TO BINGE-WATCH?

"Severance." It's a brilliantly executed and mind-bending show.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW FOR SURE?

Failure is not the end. It's a guide that helps get you to where you need to go. Trust your instincts.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE VACATION SPOT?

Maldives. Or any tropical, warm place, really. If there's sand, water, and good food available, this is the epitome of relaxation for me.



Summertime fun with my husband (Gabe) and our son (Akash).

Elsa Varghese, M.D., is Medical Strategy Director, AbelsonTaylor Group. She can be reached at 312-894-5439 or elsa.varghese@abelsontaylorgroup.com.



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Share the Memories!

HELP US CELEBRATE 35 YEARS OF HME

For our special 35th Anniversary Issue, we're collecting stories, memories, and reflections from the people who have made this industry — and HME — so special.

Please take a few minutes to share your memories and insights.

1

How did you first become involved in the healthcare marketing industry?

What was your first job or role?

2

What is one of your favorite memories from your career?

It can be funny, meaningful, unexpected, or even something that went completely wrong!

3

What do you miss most about the “old days” of healthcare marketing?

4

Who has had the greatest influence on your career, and what did you learn from them?

5

What does HME mean to you, and what is your favorite memory from over the years?

Is there a particular article, feature, event, or issue that stands out?

6

How has HME influenced your career or helped you build meaningful professional connections?

Did it introduce you to someone important, open a door, or create a lasting friendship?

7

Where were you 35 years ago?

Take us back to 1992! What were you doing, and how has your professional journey evolved since then?



HAVE A PHOTO OR HME MEMORY TO SHARE?

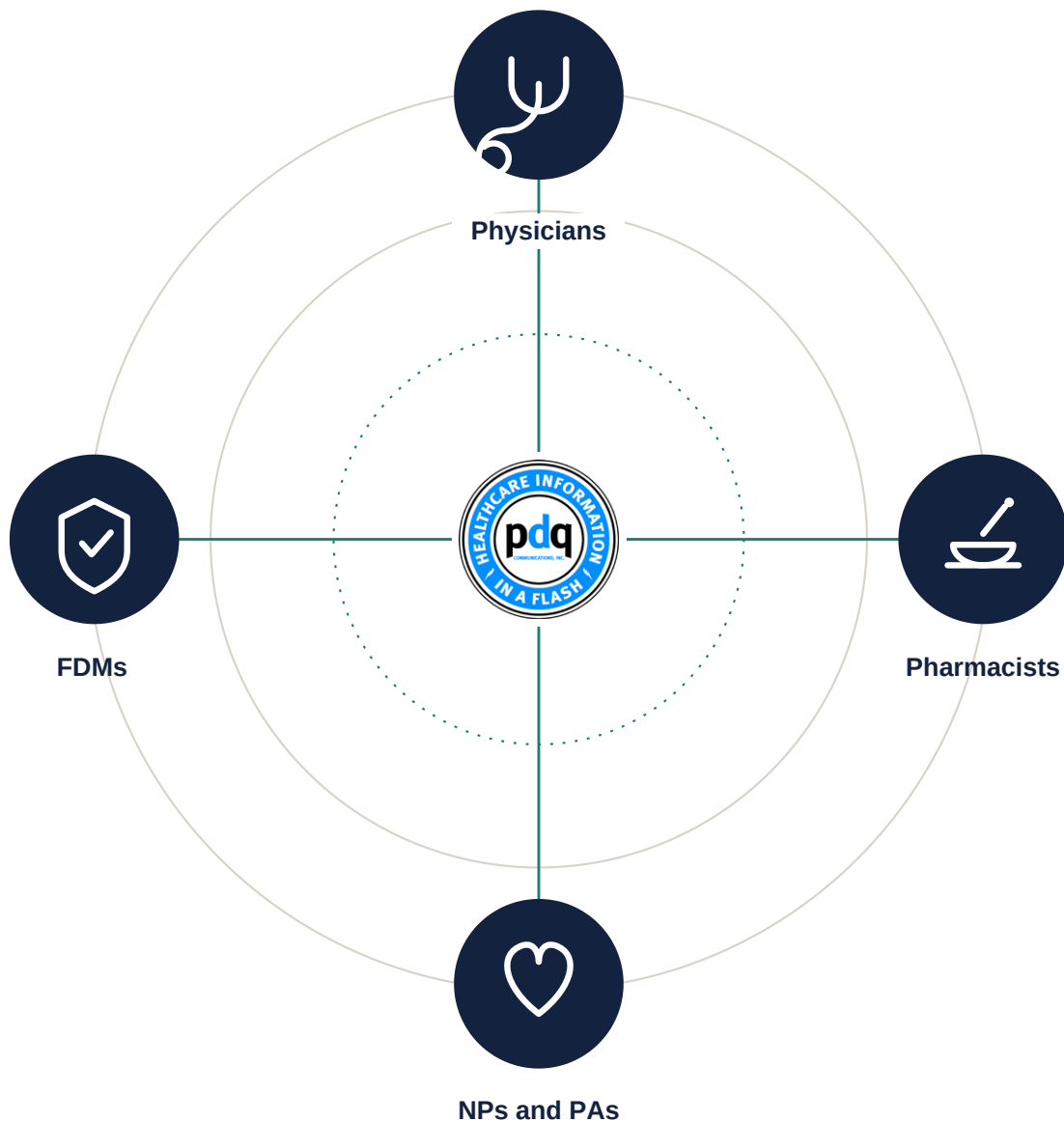
We'd love to see your conference photos, team pictures, favorite events, or anything that captures your career in healthcare marketing.

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