

In the end

By Dana Cook Grossman

Eventually, “all good things come to an end,” as the song lyric goes. But that doesn’t make the end of a good thing any easier. And it was a really good thing having Laura Carter on the DARTMOUTH MEDICINE staff for almost a decade.

The day in the fall of 1999 that Laura called me to say she’d heard there was an opening at the magazine, and was I still accepting applications, was a happy one indeed. For more than nine years, she was DARTMOUTH MEDICINE’s associate editor.

During that time, she wrote dozens of features, on subjects ranging from the impact at Dartmouth of the 1918 flu epidemic to the behind-the-scenes workers who make a hospital hum. She also turned out numerous shorter pieces; in fact, her name appears 246 times in our office’s electronic index. But the quantity of her output did not come at the cost of quality. Her work has won many awards, including the top national prize from the Association of American Medical Colleges.

She was also the only institutional journalist accepted to a 2007 New York Times Company Foundation Fellowship on the ethics and science of stem-cell research. And she did a stellar job of creating our office’s editorial internship program four years ago and overseeing it since then.

In fact, the success of our internship—the evidence of Laura’s ability to coach neophyte writers—is one reason all those accolades are written in the past tense. Since February 2, Laura has been the managing editor of the National Institutes of Health’s intramural newsletter—a communications vehicle for the scientists at the NIH’s Bethesda, Md., campus. The NIH picked Laura out of a large pool of applicants—no surprise to those who know her. Her experience with interns carried special weight with the NIH, since her new post is a one-person shop and so she’ll be working with lots of contributors who aren’t trained as writers.

For Laura’s farewell party in January, I asked colleagues to share memories of working with her so we could compile them in an album. Testimonials poured in. Here is a sample of how Laura will be remembered—excerpted from a letter by Peggy Plunkett, a DHMC clinical nurse specialist: “Laura, I had already been impressed with your writing through reading your articles in DARTMOUTH MEDICINE over the years. You always seemed to cap-

ture the essence of your subjects and their issues.

“However, during 2008, I have had the privilege of witnessing your work in action as you prepared your article on the DHMC Bioethics Committee [this was the Winter 2008 cover article—see dartmed.dartmouth.edu/w08/f01], of which I am a member. I was impressed that you attended most of our monthly meetings for (I think) a year. You also interviewed numerous members of the committee and yet you’d still call/e-mail/ask us with more questions to ensure that you ‘got it right.’ Your attention to detail and desire to tell our story accurately was impressive. Your sensitivity to our subject was heartwarming. You are a true professional, and we have been blessed to have you with us for these years.”

Clearly, our readers will miss Laura—though happily she contributed a few final pieces to this issue. And I’m missing her for sure—though I’m thrilled that she has this opportunity to apply her skills in such a stimulating new milieu.

There are two more silver linings to the sad news of her departure. One is that it gave me a chance to recognize two talented staff members whose positions have been part-time, by slightly increasing their hours and splitting Laura’s major responsibilities between them. Jen Durgin, who’s been on the staff since 2004, has taken over the internship (and will also continue to write; anyone who remembers her compelling Fall 2008 cover feature on her daughter’s cochlear implant—see dartmed.dartmouth.edu/f08/f01—knows that’s very good news). And Amos Esty, who joined us in May 2008 after three years as assistant editor of *American Scientist*, is taking over many of Laura’s editing responsibilities (he, too, will continue to write—see page 42 for proof that that’s good news). So as much as I miss Laura, thanks to Jen, Amos, and the magazine’s unflappably competent assistant editor, Matt Wiencke, I’m confident about the future.

The second silver lining is that not fully replacing Laura is allowing us to do our part in responding to the economic crisis. Just how it will affect DMS and DHMC is still playing out; we’ll share details when they’re clear. In the meantime, be assured that Dartmouth’s commitment to medical education, research, and care is undimmed.

Maybe not *all* good things come to an end. ■

DARTMOUTH MEDICINE

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