



*“Hope I  
Don't See  
You For A  
Long Time”*

A UNIQUE AND FUN VIEW FROM  
“OVER-THE-COUNTER”

*by Randall Wright, R.Ph.*

## *Foreward*

*W*hen the publisher sent me this manuscript to review, I was uncertain how I could possibly provide insight or commentary on the writings of a pharmacist. However, as I began to read, my eyes were opened, not to the science of medicine and chemical compounds, but to a rare art of interaction with humanity. Wright's insight is positively a joy to experience. He shares his personal experiences as one of the unsung professionals who quietly and soberly affect our lives, and he reveals how we, as patients, affect theirs. He touches not only the soul of the professional, but of the patient. His stories of how the depths of life, laughter, and love can enter the doors of a pharmacy and be deposited at the counter for introspection and contemplation bring forth an unexpected and inspiring perspective.

This book not only touched my heart; it brought a profound smile to my soul. It has challenged me to look twice at those whom I interact with, to take that extra moment and reflect upon their trials, heartaches, and pains — to reach out and dispense more than just a quick verse or prayer — to actually connect with them in ways that will bridge our lives with hope, joy, and peace.

Take the time to reflect upon the true art of human interaction. Being a professional not only means being good at what you do; but how you do it with class and character.

I invite you to turn the page, and when you reach the last, put it in a place where you can return to it from behind the counters of your own lives.

Enjoy. I certainly did.

**Ken Duke, Pastor**  
Coquille, Oregon

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*Sometimes a pharmacy is  
a thrilling place to be.*

## *Preface*

*A*t first, if your pharmacy experience is like mine, your work is more about the science — the facts and the knowledge, than about the people. Then, as our encounters accumulate and develop, we begin building relationships. We begin to talk to our patients, instead of at them. At times, these innumerable encounters give us more energy than they take. They do more than make us feel good. They move and inspire us. The result is an accumulation of experience that yields a deeper awareness of how to use our knowledge and how to share it.

We cannot be untouched by all of this. As time passes, we listen better, talk better, see more, and understand more. We improve the quality of the pharmacy experience. We develop. We change from a source of technical information into a gift for our patients and our community.

And our hearts grow.

This is presumptive of me to say, so I say it with caution: these stories expose the heart of pharmacy. We live in such a high tech society that high touch is, if not forgotten, then relegated to second-tier importance. These stories show that knowledge and caring matter. Where you find one, there is always a need for the other.

Presumptive or not, I'm sure some of these stories will resonate with you. We share many of the same experiences. What bonds us together is the impact we have on people — on patients. What we have in common is the effect people have on us. No one practices in a vacuum.

I hope you enjoy.

*Randall Wright*

## *“Hope I Don’t See You for A Long Time”*

At the end of every of every conversation there is a last impression. This last impression, along with the first impression, is what the person tends to remember in an otherwise commonplace conversation. If something extraordinary happens, like giving a spouse CPR, they remember the extraordinary act and not the last impression. In 33 years as a community pharmacist, I’ve given CPR twice. In the remaining near half million encounters, my impression was finalized by how I said good-bye.

I have ended my pharmacy conversations with: “Thanks”, “Come again”, “See ya later”, “Hope you get better”, “I’m sorry you’re hurting”, “I’ll keep you in my thoughts”, “Take care”, “Drive careful”, “Be careful”, “Be well”, “Stay well,” and “Call if you have any questions,” all of which are fine. They leave a nice last impression. Then one day, **“Hope I don’t see you for a long time,”** popped out of my mouth. It was perfect. It said what I wished. After all, if I don’t see them they are not sick or hurt. And it also did something for me; it told me that what I just did for them helped them. This reinforcement is a subtle, powerful and necessary fuel. *Being a pharmacist is demanding work.*

Prescription volume is increasing (and increasing!). So much pharmacology whizzes by with this increasing volume of patients. “Did I catch everything?” is as stressful a thought as it is a prayer. Allergies have to be noted with new fills and checked with refills.

Previous adverse reactions are checked against new medicines that may be similar, checked, and checked again to make sure the right medicine gets to the right patient. And while computers help, all they do is help. The computer is not blamed when an error is made. All these safety checks are interrupted by the incessant ringing of the phone or chiming of the drive-thru window (I have become Pavlov's slobbering dog.), and the patient with the question, or rash, or head lice, or fever, or constipation, or diarrhea, or headache, toothache, dog bite, broken insulin bottle, early refill request, or altered Vicodin script. All this comes with increasing frequency and patients who are upset because of expired insurance plans or higher co-pays, and of course, the demand of every person for "I want it now," when asked, "When would you like to pick this up?"

When I say, "*Hope I don't see you for a long time,*" the smile I get from the patient as the thought sinks in lightens the stress on both sides of the pharmacy counter. Sometimes.



## *“At Least Jesse James Had A Gun”*

I have started and stopped writing many times, picking up pen and letting the story flow, other times jotting down notes, always doing so because of an extreme behavior or moving encounter. There is a microcosm that exists in a retail pharmacy. Like a good novel, all the elements of drama are there: life, death, laughter, love, and dynamic characters.

A customer once said to me, “At least Jesse James had a gun.” By saying this, he inadvertently gave me my first story. A no-nonsense farmer in the midwest, he was tall, sinewy, muscular, wore a John Deere cap and had just been diagnosed with mild high blood pressure. When he found out the price of his medicine (Dyazide, a mild diuretic), he looked at me over the small bottle of capsules standing between us on the pharmacy counter, mentioned something about the price of the pills compared to a bushel of wheat, pulled out his wallet, and said, “At least Jesse James had a gun.”

I had no idea what to say. The year was 1975, and I was less than six months out of pharmacy school. His remark left me befuddled and by some odd stimulus, got me thinking about all that I see, hear and smell across the pharmacy counter. These experiences accumulated and I became aware that retail pharmacy is more than just the pharmacology that patients and their medicines represent.

*The world is a stage, or so I have read. The stories that follow are a partial listing of experiences from one stagehand.*

## Testimonials

Many of us look but do not see, hear but do not listen. Randall guides us through a tour of his world, revealing the tender to the tragic encounters with people in the passing parade of life. From a grin to a grimace he allows us to see a corner of life revealing his sensitivity so rare in our busy world.

The next time you are awake at 3 a.m., he will make you wonder what is going on at your local pharmacy.

**Jim Siress**, Vice President, RHS Training Services

What an enjoyable look into the life of one of our unnoticed servants of humanity. Randall Wright's book gave me a peek into the art of human interaction from "behind the counter" of a place most of us visit in search for help. So many times, as we approach the counters of our local pharmacies; we only think of the science of pharmacology. Yet, after reading this, I see I need to spend time with the professionals behind the counter letting them know how appreciated they really are for us, the patient, and thank them for their service and care in looking out for our well-being.

**Rev. Ken Duke**

Randall's stories demonstrate the caring and tender side of medicine. Each story takes you to places of love, laughter, sadness, trickery and tragedy. You'll step away from the pharmaceutical counter and into the hearts and souls of ordinary people getting prescriptions filled. After reading this book, your trips to the pharmacy will never be the same!

**Ruth Hermann**, Author,  
Working Woman's Communications Survival Guide

The stories are delightful, I had to make myself stop reading so that I could savor them over a few days. Thanks Randall for sharing your passion in finding joy in daily encounters.

**Maggi Choplin**, RN, COHN-S  
Medical Services Manager, Hallmark Cards

For anyone who has ever visited a pharmacy counter, Randall Wright offers a rare glimpse into the stories behind the prescriptions. You will laugh and perhaps shed a tear as he describes with compassion and insight the many human conditions behind the medications he dispenses.

Truly enjoyable and heartwarming."

**Sally Jenkins**, Sally Jenkins Communications Consulting

If you liked James Herriot's "All Creatures Great and Small", you will like this book.

**Chris and Pam Bacon**