



Moby Book



By John E. Hendry, MD

CALL ME ISHMAEL — or rather Ishmael Mobius, MD, author of a one-time best-selling textbook on obstetrics, read and revered by thousands of Ob/Gyn residents. But to be truthful, I am not really Dr. Mobius, but rather his book, perhaps the only remaining copy. I am his legacy, his intellectual thought preserved, for he himself has passed on.

Even today, glued to a shelf just above one of the dining cubicles in the Casa Maria restaurant, I believe I stand out from the other books next to me, all of us here doomed to provide a veneer of "class" in hopes of making the cuisine more appealing. For I am "Great White Book," thicker and taller than my shelfmates — and a very stunning pure white color.

I am in fact none other than "Moby Book," as I was affectionately dubbed by countless residents — the name resulting from a contraction of "Mobius OB Textbook."

I importune you with the tale of my voyage, not for my own sake, and not out of any sense of braggadocio, but rather I tell you this for your sake, as did that other tattered Ishmael, grabbing at the sleeves of people passing by on the quay of New Bedford, for an ill-boding change has occurred for books, libraries and the people that use them.

I have not always been so immobile and during the happiest part of my life I circulated among some of the finest obstetricians in Sacramento. For many year and with pride I called the Sacramento-El Dorado Medical Society library my home. That was before one year ago, when with little fanfare and even less appreciation, I was disposed of as being unnecessary and superfluous.

True, there was at the time an announcement that members of the society could take me, as it were, "free to a good home," as if I were an unwanted or unruly dog. But only a handful of books were rescued when the library closed its doors. And I perhaps should not complain about my lot, for the majority of my colleagues have probably ended up in landfills.

I do not discount the importance of the Internet as a wonderful, very accessible source of medical information, but yet there is nothing quite like the touch and feel — and, yes, even the smell of a good book! We have a wonderful tangibility that connects the reader immediately and very personally, not only with the information we contain but also with all the other scholars that have used us before and those who will use us subsequently. I am a repository of knowledge, not a relic, and even as I age, as we all must, what I contain will wax in historical value though it might wane in modernity — and I am not available on the Internet.

I must tell you that we books are all interconnected by an ethereal knowledge (for it is this that fills the interstices of the Universe) and so I can speak to you of what is happening around the country and more particularly in Sacramento. Medical libraries are closing, in hospitals and in medical societies. Librarian positions have been cut. New acquisitions

have decreased to a trickle, and number and years of subscription journals slashed. Public access to medical libraries has been severely limited, and all this justified because of the "Internet."

I purport that the real reason for this calamitous change is actually a "false economy," for book-based or print-based knowledge is complementary and not in opposition to Net-based knowledge. Countless times physicians have come to medical libraries to access my colleagues and me for solutions to pending clinical problems.

Not only have I been a comfort to them, I have been able to provide basic background and review that has in many clinical situations, sometimes linked and sometimes unlinked to current clinical advances, helped to further patient care and undoubtedly decrease total medical cost.

We books are presented in a very special format. We are easier on the eyes, much more so than E-text. We provide in many ways, once the reader selects us, easier and quicker access to our knowledge. Have you ever tried to quickly thumb through or scan E-text? Do you really think that jumping from one "hypertext" selection to another on the Net provides you the same sense of depth and control as a book in hand? We are expensive, but I think we're worth it.

Perhaps two recent episodes in my life will explain my sense of loss. Recently a party of four sat just below me at the restaurant. I recognized one of them just before he recognized me. We had been together years ago when he was still a resident in obstetrics at UC Davis. "There's the "Great White Book," he cried out to his astonished physician colleagues while pointing to me on the shelf across the table from him. With a smile spreading over his face in recognition of a long-lost friend, he futilely tried to hold me in his hand as he had done so many times before.

"It's glued to the shelf!" he said in dismay. "They've glued 'Moby Book' to the shelf!"

On another occasion, equally sad, a mother was sitting with her young son when he noticed me, pointed and said, "Mommy what's that big white thing, there?" "That's a book, dear," she answered. People used to have them in their homes before the Internet."

The barbarians are at the gate and they disguise themselves as "E-scholars."

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